

Children and Armed Conflict
12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Mougara Moussotsi, Representative of Gabon

Mr. President, your country's excellent stewardship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict attests to your leadership and deep interest in the fate of children and armed conflict. The organization of this debate confirms Germany's commitment to this important issue.

We thank the Secretary-General for his important statement on this issue early in the debate. We also express our gratitude to Ms. Coomaraswamy for the skill with which she is discharging her duty to provide greater protection for children affected by conflict, and for the highly useful information she has shared with us. Finally, we welcome the presence of the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, and reiterate our support for the significant contribution of his institution to the defence of the cause of children in general, and those affected by conflict in particular.

Today's debate is taking place in the overall context of the Security Council's action to protect civilian populations in armed conflict. As noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2011/250), thousands of children continue to fall victim to serious violations of international law in conflict zones. Gabon firmly condemns such violations, particularly the recruitment and use of child soldiers, murder, kidnapping, rape and other forms of sexual violence, the denial of access to humanitarian assistance, and attacks on schools and hospitals. These serious crimes committed by Government or armed non-State forces violate the provisions of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolution 1612 (2005).

We should like to make two observations — the first with respect to the progress achieved in the Council's normative action to protect children, and the second concerning the challenges we continue to face in protecting children in the field.

Turning first to the normative framework, we applaud the considerable headway achieved since the adoption of resolutions 1379 (2001), 1539 (2004) and, most particularly, 1612 (2005), establishing the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Since the adoption of resolution 1882 (2009), the Security Council has been able to refer to lists, annexed to the reports of the Secretary-General, of parties to armed conflict who commit the murder and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence. Together, these measures constitute an effective architecture for raising the awareness of all parties to conflict on the gravity of the crimes they may commit. Such measures are also deterrent in terms of the sanctions which their perpetrators run the risk of incurring.

This progress has also strengthened the activities of peace missions and facilitated the work of the principal actors on the ground. In that regard, we stress the key role played by advisers in the protection component of peace missions. We point to the success achieved in Chad, the Sudan, the Central African Republic and, most especially, the Democratic Republic of the Congo thanks to the joint activities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNICEF that contributed to the liberation of many child soldiers.

The progress we have made should not make us lose sight of the various challenges remaining ahead in ensuring the more effective protection of children in situations of armed conflict. In that regard, I would raise two specific issues.

First, it is deplorable that certain Governments remain strongly resistant to the possibility of engaging in constructive dialogue with the United Nations with a view to signing an action plan geared to ending violence against children in armed conflict. It is also regrettable to note that increasing numbers of parties to conflict are targeting public institutions, such as schools and hospitals that shelter children, teachers and medical staff. Gabon therefore supports your initiative, Sir, of considering the inclusion of attacks on children in schools and hospitals on the list of criteria for listing persons accused of serious violations against children in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports.

In conclusion, we express our desire to see the Security Council's action to protect children in armed conflict subject to ongoing evaluation and strengthening in order to make our struggle against the impunity of offenders more effective, especially with regard to the heinous crimes perpetrated against children. Gabon will continue to support the international community's fight against the use of children in armed conflict and all forms of abuse, violence and deprivation to which they are subject.