

## **Children and Armed Conflict**

**12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber**

### ***Statement by Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri, Representative of India***

I, too, would like to express our appreciation for Germany's able stewardship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and its organization of today's debate.

Rabindranath Tagore, the national poet of India, said that "every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man". Children constitute one-third of humankind — the most important third. They are also the weakest and therefore the most susceptible to suffering. If we are to be judged by how we treat the weakest among us, then we have a lot to account for.

Children continue to suffer appallingly from violence, hunger and illness. What is perhaps most tragic is the manner in which millions of children are condemned to live their lives on the margins, bereft of opportunity and sometimes of hope. They do so as other, more fortunate children embark upon lives of unprecedented prosperity and promise.

President Nelson Mandela has said that "we owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear". This is, in some ways, the primary responsibility of every Government — the most important element of the social contract between Governments and citizens. The work of the United Nations on children in general, and on children and armed conflict in particular, is therefore among its most important activities.

India believes that the international community has the responsibility and, indeed, the obligation to do its utmost to provide succour to children affected by armed conflict. We have engaged constructively in the ongoing efforts to make the work of the United Nations more relevant and effective in this area. We strongly support the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We have participated actively in its deliberations and will continue to contribute to the strengthening of a regime that protects children in situations of armed conflict.

The work being done by the international community in this area is in some ways on the cutting edge of international politics and international law. We need to move forward with deliberation, taking into account the concerns and experiences of Member States. India has a number of concerns about the manner in which Security Council resolutions in this area are being interpreted. Several representatives who have spoken before me have raised the same concerns.

My delegation believes that the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations must be followed consistently and scrupulously. Member States should not outsource the exercise of their basic prerogatives and responsibilities to international civil servants. The actions of the international community that have legal and judicial characteristics must be in accordance with the doctrine of natural justice and separation of powers. The principle of *audi alteram partem* — or "hear the other side" — must be adhered to. Mandate creep must be checked and countered.

India deplores grave violations and crimes committed against children during war. We have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, and are committed to the norms and practices associated with this international regime.

The Government of India accords the highest priority to ensuring that the rights of children in India are protected. Nineteen per cent of the world's children are Indian, and we have created a legal and institutional framework to protect and promote their rights and their well-being. A national charter for children has been adopted. Free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years has been declared a fundamental right that is enforceable. A National Commission for the Protection of Children has also been set up and a national plan of action for children has been adopted.

The Government of India is committed to creating, through these and other initiatives, a protective environment for children. In this connection, I would also like to point out that Indian civil society is an

integral part of that framework. We consider civil society to be a valued partner in our national and international efforts on children's issues.

India has been at the forefront of converting the Council's word into deed through its peacekeeping mandates. More than 100,000 Indian troops and police officers have participated in peacekeeping operations over the past five decades. Based on our experience on the ground, we would like to emphasize that the central challenge to the implementation of the Council's mandates is the question of resources. I am sure that Special Representative Coomaraswamy, whose zeal is remarkable, will agree with me when I say that peacekeeping missions require more child protection advisers with more resources.

My country would encourage the Special Representative to work with national authorities in developing capacities to deal with children in armed conflict. We believe that support for efforts by national authorities to end impunity and ensure accountability should be a key focus area.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism requires the involvement of Member States and close supervision by them in order to ensure veracity and credibility. We expect that the processes of data collection and analysis and of listing and de-listing will be carried out in a transparent and judicious manner under the close supervision of Member States.

Vast numbers of children are affected and traumatized by armed conflict. However, we cannot lose sight of the economic and social marginalization of the poorest nations that is driving hundreds of millions of children towards childhoods that could well make them part of tomorrow's problems rather than tomorrow's solutions. We need to address this broader picture of the destitution and desperation that claim even more lives than armed conflict and often pave the way for a fresh cycle of violence. This dynamic, unfortunately, neither attracts international media attention nor appears on the Security Council's agenda. Nevertheless, in our discussions here the Council must ensure its clear focus in order not to lose sight of the emergency before it, which constitutes a global challenge.

In concluding, I would like to quote an English author who said that "children begin by loving their parents; after a time, they judge them; rarely, if ever, do they forgive them". We must not be found lacking in our efforts if we expect any chance of forgiveness from the children of our future.