

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

Statement by Mr. Kamau, Representative of Kenya

Allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to express our gratitude to you, Mr. President, for presiding over this important meeting. Kenya appreciates the global importance and priority that the Security Council and the international community continue to attach to the protection of children affected by or involved in armed conflict.

My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2011/250) — which enumerates the grave violations committed against children in armed conflicts, the progress made in the release of children from armed groups and the challenges faced in dealing with some of the parties to conflicts — as well as for the recommendations it contains. We also very much appreciate the statement delivered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and by the Executive Director of UNICEF.

Child protection should be part and parcel of any conflict management and prevention strategy. In that regard, we appreciate the progress made through the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Kenya welcomes the attention that is being drawn today to the issue of children and armed conflict, especially as it relates to attacks on schools and hospitals. But it is Kenya's observation that, while deplorable, attacks on schools and hospitals are symptomatic of a deeper and more troublesome situation of civil strife, abuse of human rights and failure in governance, law and order. It is imperative that the Security Council and the international community at large address those fundamental causes as well.

While Kenya recognizes the progress made over the years, significant challenges remain. We recognize the situation in countries listed in the Secretary General's report. For Kenya, the situation in Somalia presents a clear, persistent and continuing threat to national security and to our economy.

As highlighted by the Secretary-General in his report, engaging armed terrorist groups, for example Al-Shabaab, for purposes of curbing the involvement of children in armed conflict remains a formidable challenge. The consequences of the involvement of children in armed conflict are devastating, not only in Somalia but also beyond that country.

In Kenya, the burden of more than 20 years of conflict in Somalia and the continued flow of refugees is enormous and harmful to our society and economy. Kenya is host to the Dadaab refugee camp, which is the world's largest such camp. With more than half a million refugees, the camp is stretched beyond its capacity. As we speak, more than 1,000 new refugees, consisting mainly of women and children, including ex-soldiers and children who have been in armed conflict, cross into Kenya every day. That is more 30,000 new refugees every month.

Following terrorist acts committed by Al-Shabaab, the World Food Programme was forced out of Somalia. This is a cause for grave concern, as we know that the availability of food is a powerful deterrent in the recruitment of child soldiers.

We therefore urge the Security Council to redouble its efforts to help the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and neighbouring countries, including ours, to put down these terrorist groups. We must not attempt to placate or engage in dialogue with terrorists. Only this will help to normalize the situation in a country such as Somalia, bring an end to the recruitment of children and facilitate the resumption of emergency assistance to the Somali population.

Kenya recognizes the decades of civil war that the new Republic of South Sudan has suffered, with many children involved either as child soldiers or as victims of the conflict. Kenya carried a heavy burden with regard to those children during the years of the civil war. There is an urgent need for heightened support in dealing with post-conflict trauma for affected children and families, including in South Sudan. As we join others in

congratulating the Republic of South Sudan on attaining its independence and becoming the newest State, we encourage States and other international actors to support the new Government in promoting the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of children and families affected by the armed conflict. The measures adopted should not only realize their medium-term development but also their long-term aspirations.

In conclusion, as a troop-contributing country, Kenya welcomes the Secretary-General's call for a specific provision for children's protection to continue to be included in the mandate of all peacekeeping operations, as well as for the inclusion of child protection in pre-deployment training. That will no doubt enhance the broad and effective protection of children in armed conflict, including protecting those in schools and hospitals.

Having said that, we should never lose sight of the fact that the most effective way to protect children is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts and to prevent conflicts from escalating by addressing the multiplicity of causes of conflicts, including climate change, hunger, disease, exploitation and underdevelopment.