

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

Statement by Mr. Han Thu, Representative of Myanmar

At the outset, my delegation wishes to express our gratitude to you, Sir, for presiding over this important meeting. We also join previous speakers in thanking Ms. Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their updated information on the situation of the protection of children in armed conflicts. It is most timely that the Council is considering this important issue following the release of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2011/250).

Children are the most innocent and vulnerable victims of armed conflicts. Most often in conflicts, they are abused and deprived of their basic human rights. Children are still being recruited as combatants, maimed, killed and raped in various armed conflicts. Crime against children is unforgivable. Despite the measures prescribed in international humanitarian law and Security Council mandates, children continue to suffer in conflict situations around the world.

Ensuring national reconciliation, the rule of law, the protection of human rights and the promotion of sustainable development and poverty eradication are the best approaches to preventing conflict and to enhancing the protection of children on a long-term basis. The international community and the United Nations have a vital role to play in assisting States to establish an environment in which children can best enjoy their basic rights and be better protected.

We believe that the primary responsibility for protecting children and promoting their welfare lies with States. The Government of Myanmar has made a commitment that no children under the age of 18 will be recruited into military service. Our armed forces are purely voluntary, and those entering military service do so of their own free will. There is neither a draft system nor forced conscription in our country. Moreover, under the Myanmar Defence Services Act of April 1974 and War Office regulation 13/73, a person cannot be enlisted in the armed forces until he or she has reached the age of 18. This regulation is strictly enforced. The Government has also initiated an active advocacy programme to prevent the recruitment of under-age children into military service. We have strict scrutiny and inspection procedures in place at the recruitment stage. New recruits who do not meet the minimum age requirement or other qualifications are rejected or discharged from the armed forces.

The Judge Advocate-General's Office of the Ministry of Defence oversees strict adherence to military recruitment orders, directives and regulations. In that context, from January to April of this year a total of 36 persons who failed to meet the recruitment requirements were discharged from the military. Along with discharging and reuniting under-age children with their families, punitive actions were also taken against one officer and 11 soldiers of other ranks for their failure to abide by existing recruitment rules and regulations.

We have made it crystal clear that the Myanmar Government is eager for the name of our army, Tatmadaw Kyi, to be de-listed from the annex of the Secretary-General's report. To reach that goal, we are preparing a draft national plan of action that includes the elements provided by UNICEF and samples of the plans of action of three different countries, which we received from the Special Representative's Office. The technical working group comprised of officials from the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Attorney-General's office and the Chief Justice's office met with representatives from UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) four times from September 2010 to March 2011.

With flexibility from both sides, we hope to finalize our national plan of action. On our part, Myanmar will continue to cooperate fully with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and UNDP to conclude a national plan of action in the near future. Our aspiration is for the name of our national army to be de-listed from the annex to the Secretary-General's report.