

Security Council Open Debate on Children in Armed Conflict, June 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Thu, Permanent Mission of Myanmar to the United Nations.

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting on the important issue of children and armed conflict. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for providing us with the report contained in document S/2013/245. And I take this opportunity to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her positive commendation of the Government of Myanmar on the important steps it has taken to better protect children.

Indeed, my delegation is pleased to see many positive conclusions about my own country in the Secretary-General's report. The very first paragraph on Myanmar highlights the fact that **S/PV.6980S/PV.6980** “[i]n 2012 there were encouraging commitments and actions by the Government of Myanmar to prevent and end grave violations against children” (*S/2013/245, para. 99*).

It also acknowledges that the number of cases of the recruitment and use of children by the national armed forces has decreased, thanks to prevention measures and strengthened recruitment processes. That progress was the result of the wide-ranging democratic reform measures instituted by the new Government just over two years ago, which included its renewed commitment and efforts towards promoting and protecting the fundamental rights of the people, including women and children. The signing on 27 June 2012 of an action plan between the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations country team was a historic development that demonstrated the Government's firm commitment to ending the recruitment and use of underage children by the armed forces.

The implementation of our action plan has gained momentum with the launching, in cooperation with the country task force on monitoring and reporting, of an awareness campaign among the armed forces, at various levels, designed to increase understanding of the laws and regulations prohibiting underage recruitment. There were reports of a slight rise in the number of complaints of underage recruitment in 2012 compared to 2011, but that was due not to actual recruitment increases but to enhanced awareness of the complaint mechanism and a newfound freedom of expression.

Just seven months after the signing of the action plan, a total of 66 underage recruits were allowed to demobilize and reintegrate with their parents on two occasions. During 2012 alone, 538 potential underage recruits were rejected at the screening stage. The number of demobilized so far may not yet match the list of suspected underage recruits provided by the country task force, as it is a time-consuming job to check and verify them thoroughly around the country; the list may also include fabricated complaints. My delegation fully recognizes that many challenges remain to be addressed. There may still be some cases of individuals who are guilty of illegal recruitment, intentionally or unintentionally. The Government does not condone such individual violators. We must therefore distinguish isolated cases of certain individuals from the policy of the armed forces as a whole, which have laws prohibiting the recruitment of underage children for military services.

With regard to access to operational regiments, since the action plan was launched the Government has already allowed the country task force to make at least 10 visits to monitor regional commands, basic military training facilities, military recruitment centres and mobile recruitment teams. Visits to some areas have been put on hold due to the absence of many officers and other ranks from their regiments on ongoing national duty for overriding reasons of defence, security, disaster prevention or resettlement. The absence in large numbers of the rank and file does not make for effective or meaningful monitoring visits.

As my delegation has stated time and again, the best way to enhance the protection of children in armed conflict is to address the root causes of those conflicts by promoting peace, national reconciliation, sustainable development, poverty eradication and the protection of human rights. The reported violations took place during military clashes in Kachin State more than a year ago. That fighting is now a thing of the past. The guns have fallen silent in every corner of the country since the Government recently reached ceasefire agreements with almost all the armed groups, including the remaining group of the Kachin Independence Organization, which has also struck an agreement with the Government in recent peace talks. Just last week the Government granted humanitarian access to Kachin State for the first time in a year. We hope that the spread of peace and security will eliminate the alleged violations in both our armed forces and non-State armed groups.

The action plan and renewed commitment are now in place to further address the issue. The Government needs greater encouragement from the United Nations, with full understanding of our challenges, in order to speed up its implementation. If the United Nations can increase its support for Myanmar's efforts to achieve full implementation of the action plan, and de-list Myanmar's armed forces, the Tatmadaw Kyi, Myanmar could become a model success story of the ending of the use of child soldiers. To that end, Myanmar looks forward to working closely with the Office of the Special Representative and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.