

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

Statement by Mr. McLay, Representative of New Zealand

New Zealand thanks the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2011/250), Ms. Coomaraswamy for her outstanding work as his Special Representative and Germany for organizing this debate during the month of its presidency, thus giving us an opportunity to influence the Council's consideration of the issue of children and armed conflict, including through the informal event it hosted on 30 June.

For the Council's decisions to be effective, the commitment and investment of the wider United Nations community is also required. For the 177 countries that cannot sit at this table, participation in the Council's work ensures that commitment, and regard to our voices encourages that investment.

It is important to remember that, as we sit in the Chamber today, children are still being forced out of classrooms and playgrounds and onto battlefields. They are suffering the vilest forms of sexual abuse and rape. They are being disfigured, maimed and even murdered. The Council's actions can improve the lives of those children, as has been demonstrated through its institutional innovations, such as the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and through the consolidation and implementation of the protection framework. But, as always, more concrete action can be taken that will improve the lives of children affected by conflict, including girls, minorities such as indigenous children and children with disabilities.

To that end, New Zealand fully endorses the recommendations made a short time ago by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. Given the time constraints, I will not repeat those points except to say that New Zealand welcomes the addition of a new educational and medical trigger. We support strengthened sanctions and other targeted measures to punish and deter persistent perpetrators. And we urge the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict more effectively to follow-up on its recommendations. I will expand, if I can, on just three points.

First, the Council can better target persistent perpetrators. As well as asking the Secretary-General again to list persistent perpetrators in his annual report, the Council could designate child-protection criteria in the mandates of the relevant sanctions committees and request child-protection expertise in its expert groups. The Council could also seek the advice of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General more often and more systematically emphasize the cross-cutting nature of this issue by including concerns about children in its reports.

Secondly, more effective action can be taken to ensure the implementation of the Council's resolutions and conclusions. The Working Group could, for example, use the full range of tools at its disposal, as well as emergency meetings, to respond to crisis situations and to follow up on its recommendations. Child protection provisions could be more systematically included in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

It is not just the Security Council, however, that must act to protect children. Member States and the various United Nations organs also have a vital role to play. We urge those countries concerned, for example, to allow United Nations country teams to contact non-State actors so that they can prepare action plans and carry out other protection measures. We ask the Council to take a more active role to ensure that context.

Those are just a few steps that could be taken to protect children affected by conflict even more. There are others. It is to the Council's credit that its actions over the past decade have improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of children. But hundreds of thousands are still affected. It is our collective duty to take bold and effective action to protect them all. That duty is one for each and every one of us.