

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

Statement by Mr. Haroon Permanent Representative to Pakistan

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): Mr. President, I wish to express strong appreciation for your interest in this frank discussion on children and armed conflict. I wish also to convey my very strong support for the diligence of the Secretary-General in presenting the report (S/2011/250) on time, for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the work she has put in and for the Executive Director of UNICEF as well.

I need not go in detail about love for children and how it transcends social, cultural and all developmental factors. The United Nations Charter itself speaks of the noble objective of saving succeeding generations. The international community has conceived the Convention on the Rights of the Child; Pakistan was one of the six co-initiators of that summit in 1990 which provided the due fillip for the ratification of the Convention.

Pakistan also takes pride in being actively involved in promoting and protecting the rights of the child. We have a national commission for child welfare in development, in collaboration with UNICEF and the International Labour Organization, and we have worked for legislation on the progressive elimination of child labour, the rehabilitation of working children, formal and non-formal education, free vocational training and skill development. The United Nations agencies have been very helpful throughout this process.

We have also signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, and have worked on the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which is at a very advanced stage and within this year will see fruition. I do not think that anyone in this Chamber will ignore these noble intentions; but even hell has a path paved with good intentions, and we must have what I consider strictures where the mandate is concerned. The children and armed conflict mandate was created by the Council precisely to look into such situations, to ensure that the rights of children are protected in the worst environments of conflict. This is very important; indeed it is the crucial core of what needs to be achieved.

There are thousands and thousands of derivations of actions that this body takes. How many can we stretch into without losing the direction of the core? I think that all other situations should be aptly covered by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other relevant United Nations agencies. As a refresher, I would like to recall that in 2001 we adopted resolution 1379 (2001), of which paragraph 16 is the important feature. That paragraph speaks of parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in violation of the international obligations applicable to them, in situations that are on the Security Council's agenda or that may be brought to the attention of the Council by the Secretary-General, in accordance with Article 99 of the Charter, which in his opinion — and I want to underline this — may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

Then in 2009, in resolution 1882 (2009), we added, in paragraph 19 (a), the words “or in other situations of concern”. The important phrase here is “in accordance with paragraph 3 of the present resolution”. Paragraph 3 says that the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports should be “in accordance with the conditions set out in paragraph 16 of its resolution 1379 (2001)”, which I just read. That remains the core, which cannot be in any way mitigated or set aside.

When there have been attempts to do so, the Office of Legal Affairs points out the difficulties. In a note to the Special Representative in 2009, the Office wrote that that this terminology has been used by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in the title of the annex, without a clear mandate of the Security Council nor, for that matter, its endorsement, and that that situation gives rise to legal, political and practical difficulties for the Secretary-General, the Special Representative and the Secretariat as a whole.

Today, the Council has decided to amend this further, and in paragraph 22 (a) the wording about situations of concern has been removed and replaced by “or in other situations”. So we should start to lose any ambiguity and understand where we stand to do this good work. The work is exemplary, but it starts moving elsewhere. I endorse what my Indian colleague said earlier. We have four trigger mechanisms; let us keep them going. Let us

not make things contentious. That is what the United Nations is all about: the letter of the law. Who better than the Security Council to know about that?

I would like to say that the reference to Pakistan, from my Government's point of view, is misleading and serves to accord undeserved respectability to terrorists and criminals — which would be greatly unfortunate. There are no provisions for situations other than armed conflict. In conclusion, I have been asked by my Government to condemn in the strongest possible terms any use of children by extremists or any other groups to promote their nihilistic agenda, and to say that my Government is taking appropriate action to stop such practices. At the same time, we sincerely hope that the future reports of the Secretary-General will remain higher on objectivity but squarely correspond to the given mandate.