

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

Statement by Mr. Pankin, Representative of Russian Federation

We are pleased to welcome you, Sir, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of your country, to the President's chair at this Security Council meeting, and thank our German colleagues for taking the initiative to hold this meeting and for their very professional chairmanship of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We are grateful to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon; his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Radhika Coomaraswamy; and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, for their attention to the problem of protecting children in armed conflict and for their useful information on the state of affairs in this area.

Despite all the steps being undertaken at the international and national levels and the existence of a broad international legal basis, we note that children continue to be one of the most vulnerable groups suffering in armed conflicts. The Security Council, within the framework of its mandate to promote international peace and security, grants significant attention to this issue. In this regard, we welcome the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011) today, and hope that its implementation will contribute to enhancing the system for protecting children and international cooperation in this area as a whole.

However, we would like to point out that the task of protecting children is system-wide in nature, and it is important that the work done in this area be well coordinated. That will enhance its effectiveness and prevent any duplication of efforts, because these questions are also handled by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, within their respective mandates. There is a clear need, therefore, to respect the existing system of burden-sharing among the various United Nations bodies, in accordance with the Charter and other international legal instruments. Significant work is also being undertaken in this area by several international organizations within the United Nations system, in particular UNICEF.

Resolution 1612 (2005) laid the basis for protecting children during armed conflicts and the post-conflict reconstruction process, including through the monitoring and accountability mechanism and the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We believe that those instruments should focus principally on the most severe and large-scale armed conflicts on the agenda of the Security Council, including situations where States agree to their case being considered by the Working Group. In this context, it is particularly important to establish close cooperation, dialogue and trust, which should help to improve the situation of children on the ground.

We have closely studied the report of the Secretary-General (S/2011/250), and we note that it contains a wealth of information. Nevertheless, we must once again point out the doubtful reliability of some of the evidence referred to in the report. Clearly, a balanced assessment based on objective and reliable information will guarantee further practical implementation of the recommendations contained in the report. We express our concern at the loose interpretation of what is meant by "armed conflict" in the report. This leads the report to include references to situations of concern. In this context we would like to point out that there is no justification for the references in the report to India, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines and Haiti. The situations in those countries cannot be called armed conflicts.

The work on the report and on the draft resolution has shown — as have the discussions — that many countries have problems as to how the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict is actually implementing some aspects of her mandate. We believe that the time has now come for a broad discussion of this issue in order to answer Governments' concerns.

With regard to the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General, we support the idea of the need to give equal attention to all six categories of serious violations of children. Crimes against children must not go unpunished. It is also necessary to take long-term measures for the rehabilitation of children who are affected by conflicts and for their reintegration into society. It is extremely important in this connection to establish the right conditions for children to obtain uninterrupted and complete education, and also to have access to comprehensive health care.

Finally, it is important to consistently enhance the mechanisms for bringing to justice those who are guilty of violating the rights of children. I repeat, impunity is not acceptable.

We strongly condemn the killing and maiming of children, both during planned attacks and as a result of indiscriminate or excessive use of force. Despite the additional measures being taken to prevent this from happening, including by international military presence, they occur with tragic regularity. We believe it is unacceptable to try to describe the victims among civilian populations, particularly children, as collateral damage. That contradicts the provisions of the Geneva Convention. We advocate careful investigation of such incidents and punishment for the guilty.

Nor is it acceptable that children should continue to be detained in military prisons of international forces without having access to the civil justice system. We call on the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict to give particular attention to this issue.

In conclusion, I would like to express again the view that effective cooperation, including in the area of protection of children, is impossible without cooperation with the Governments of countries involved in conflicts or in the post-conflict reconstruction stage. In that context we stress the importance of cooperation between United Nations missions and United Nations country teams with non-State armed groups must take place only with the agreement of the Governments involved in those conflicts.