

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

Statement by Mr. Ja'afari, Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

I should like at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I thank also the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her briefing, and those speakers who also briefed the Council at the beginning of this morning's meeting. I also welcome the presence of Mr. John Asselborn among us.

We have read with interest the report of the Secretary-General before us on children and armed conflict (S/2013/245). Despite the fact that the Special Representative has, for the first time, addressed in her report the issue of the crimes and violations committed by armed terrorist groups, particularly with regard to recruitment of children, it is regrettable that she disregarded other incidents reported and documented by many governmental and non-governmental sources. Those sources have reaffirmed that Salafist and Wahhabi fundamentalist groups have recruited children. It took the Special Representative two years to include those armed terrorist groups on the list, despite the fact that they recruit children in the context of the conflict in Syria.

We would have wished that the Special Representative had requested in her recommendation on Syria that the States sponsors of fundamentalist terrorist groups, which are known to all by now, stop supporting those groups by financing them and providing to them arms, munitions, information and intelligence, and that they lift the unilateral coercive economic measures that they have imposed on the Syrian people, of which Syrian children are the primary victims as a result of the lack of development programmes and financing and due to the weakness of the national economy.

It is most alarming that the Special Representative insists on including the Syrian armed forces on the list and on considering them responsible for the bombing of schools and hospitals, even for disfiguring children and committing acts of sexual violence against them.

Allow me to address those claims one by one.

First, with respect to the bombing of schools and hospitals, let me say that we welcomed the Special Representative and her delegation in late 2012. She met with the ministers concerned, particularly the Minister of Education, who provided her with documented proof of the extent of the acts of terrorism committed against educational establishments and schools by armed terrorist groups. She also made expanded field visits to schools, hospitals and shelters in Damascus, Homs and the surrounding areas; however, for some reason, she chose to disregard what she saw with her own eyes: that the Syrian Government is using those schools as shelters for numerous families.

Acts of aggression by armed terrorist groups continue to be perpetrated against educational establishments in Syria; this has been documented. Such acts include forcibly preventing inhabitants from sending their children to school and bombing schools and nearby areas, including deliberately, as happened with an engineering school and other schools in Damascus.

The health-care infrastructure has also been targeted by those armed terrorist groups, which have destroyed, burned and looted more than 35 per cent of Syrian hospitals. We have provided the Special Representative with a video recording, with sound, of terrorists preparing to bomb a hospital and another recording of the detonation itself. However, there is no mention of that heinous crime in the report. That incident alone should have been sufficient to warrant the inclusion of those terrorist groups on the list of shame for having bombed schools and hospitals.

Secondly, with respect to the killing and disfiguring of children, the world has seen the repulsive crimes perpetrated by terrorist groups against children since the beginning of the crisis. Mohammed Qatta, a 14-year-old child, was shot to death in Aleppo by elements of a fundamentalist terrorist brigade of the al-Nusra Front calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. He was whipped and tortured in front of his parents on charges of blasphemy. In another incident, a 4-year-old child named Faisal was hanged by terrorist fundamentalist groups after being raped and dragged for a great distance.

Two days ago, on the Saudi Al-Arabiya satellite channel, we witnessed the excitement of a Salafist Wahhabi sheikh from Kuwait, Shafi al-Ajami, who takes pride in having cut the throats of Syrian children in Hatla, in Deir Ezzor. Many other heinous crimes have been committed by the al-Nusra Front that should have been included on the list of terrorists provided to the Council.

Thirdly, concerning sexual violence against children, how is it possible that the crimes committed by those terrorist armed groups, including rape and sexual violence, the murder of children, and acts of violence against girls and women throughout Syria were not mentioned in the report? How could the taking of girls and women as spoils of war and sex slaves not be mentioned? How could that group of thugs of war, sexual perverts and cannibals who reside in certain Gulf sheikhdoms be free to issue edicts on satellite channels making such crimes permissible under the banner of sexual jihad or “fornication jihad”?

We denounce the fact that the report fails to make mention of the suffering of Syrian children under Israeli occupation in the occupied Syrian Golan. We have drawn the attention of Ms. Zerrougui to this issue several times since she took office, emphasizing the necessity to give it due importance in her reports. She has not done so, however.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the Syrian Government is committed to protecting its citizens, particularly children, and that all perpetrators of acts that violate the safety and security of children will be held strictly accountable. In addition, the Syrian Government passed a law this year criminalizing the involvement of children under 18 in any armed conflict, punishable by 10 to 20 years of hard labour.