

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

***Statement by Ms. Rice, Representative of United States of America***

We are grateful to you, Mr. President, as well as to Ambassador Wittig and the German Mission, for hosting this important debate and for your leadership as Chair of the Security Council Working Group. We also very much appreciate the important statements by the Secretary-General, Special Representative Coomaraswamy and UNICEF Executive Director Tony Lake.

Abuses against children in armed conflicts do not just tear at our hearts, they also rip the fabric of our societies, undermine our shared security and challenge us all to do far more to bring these outrages to an end. The toll never ceases to shock. According to a recent UNESCO report, between 1998 and 2008 an estimated 2 million children were killed in conflicts and 6 million were left disabled. Approximately 300,000 children are reportedly being exploited as soldiers. Let there be no doubt: we are failing the world's children so long as so many continue to suffer such brutality and abuse.

This is not to diminish the work that has already been done to assist children in armed conflicts around the world. Since 2004, the United Nations has signed 15 action plans in nine conflict zones, and concluded five of them. The Special Representative and United Nations agencies in the field have had a measurable impact on the ground. One of the brightest spots in the Secretary-General's otherwise depressing report (S/2011/250) is the number of child soldiers who have been released. An estimated 6,300 children were released from such servitude this year in the Sudan, Nepal, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burma and Sri Lanka. We have increased the spotlight on grave abuses. We have built up our information-gathering capacity, including comprehensive reports by the Secretary-General. We have listed serious perpetrators and frankly examined individual country situations.

All those steps by the Working Group help to keep such abuses squarely on the international agenda and to bring them to the urgent attention of national authorities. But, as we all know, a great deal more needs to be done. For instance, I have just returned from witnessing the birth of the Republic of South Sudan. Some progress has been made throughout the Sudan, notably the release over the past year of almost 1,200 children from the terror of armed groups. The United Nations has concluded action plans and signed memorandums of understanding with several groups in the Sudan. But the abuses persist, including by the Lord's Resistance Army and others. The Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese Armed Forces have not yet signed and implemented an action plan.

Separately, we urge the former Sudan People's Liberation Movement to continue to implement its now-expired 2009 action plan, as well as to sign a formal extension of that plan. In Burma there are still child soldiers within the ranks of Government forces and armed groups. The Government of Burma has committed to stop the recruitment and use of child soldiers and to develop an action plan with the United Nations. We urge it to do so as soon as possible and to draw from the expertise of relevant agencies, such as the International Labour Organization and UNICEF.

We are deeply troubled as well by the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Half a dozen groups from that country are listed in annex I of the report of the Secretary-General. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has failed to engage meaningfully with the United Nations to end abuses against children committed by its armed forces. As a result, child recruitment has risen in some areas. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should move immediately to remedy those alarming violations, including by finalizing and signing a long-overdue action plan with the United Nations.

This year's report also documents another appalling trend, namely, increased attacks on schools and hospitals, in particular in Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Burma, Pakistan, Yemen and the Philippines. In Côte d'Ivoire alone, according to UNICEF, 224 schools were attacked during the post-election crisis, disrupting the education of some 65,000 children. The report of the Secretary-General documents such attacks. With today's resolution (resolution 1998 (2011)), the Secretary-General will have the mandate to name and shame those who perpetrate such attacks on a recurrent basis.

Overall, we remain deeply concerned that persistent perpetrators continue their violations against children with impunity. Sixteen parties to armed conflict listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report have been listed for five years or more. That is plainly unacceptable. Thus, the United States urged the inclusion in today's resolution of the Council's timebound commitment to consider a broad range of options to increase pressure on persistent perpetrators. The Council's unanimous support for that commitment is an important step towards holding egregious violators accountable for their actions.

Today, let us rededicate ourselves to working towards a world in which all children have the security, opportunity and hope that we seek for our own sons and daughters.