

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

***Statement by Mr. Radebe, Representative of South Africa***

We would like to take this opportunity, Mr. President, to thank you for presiding over today's meeting and your delegation for having organized this important debate. We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their respective briefings. We also welcome resolution 1998 (2011), which has just been adopted.

South Africa remains deeply concerned about the plight of children in armed conflict. Children involved in armed conflict are deprived of the opportunity to grow up in an environment where they can realize their full potential. South Africa is particularly concerned that thousands of children continue to bear arms as soldiers and that many also suffer as victims in armed conflict.

We thus remain steadfast in our firm commitment to eradicating the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Significant progress has been made since the compilation by Graça Machel in 1996 of the first United Nations report on children affected by armed conflict (A/51/306). South Africa is pleased that the issue of children and armed conflict continues to receive the attention it deserves on the agenda of the United Nations in general and the Security Council in particular. We are encouraged that the Council has identified six grave violations committed against children in armed conflict. Our country believes that each should be given equal weight and attention by the Council.

In that regard, we welcome the expansion of the trigger mechanism for punitive measures against those committing recurrent attacks on schools and hospitals. We are concerned about the emerging trend of such attacks. We call on all parties involved in conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and to refrain from attacks against civilian targets, particularly those where children might be present.

South Africa is concerned that, despite the positive efforts of the international community to address the challenges faced by children in armed conflict, parties continue to commit violations against children. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Palestine, Afghanistan and elsewhere, children continue to be casualties of war and their rights continue to be violated. We are also concerned that a substantial number of countries and situations where children are involved in armed conflict are on the African continent. We welcome the improvement of the conditions of children involved in armed conflict in some areas, such as in Burundi. We call on parties that remain on the list to follow the example of those States and entities that have adopted specific action plans to improve the situation. South Africa is deeply concerned about recently reported additional violations in emerging conflicts, such as in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya. We call upon affected Governments, with the assistance of civil society and the international donor community, to develop and implement concrete plans to address the challenge of children affected by armed conflict. The international donor community should continue to provide long-term and sustainable assistance to facilitate such programmes.

On our part, South Africa has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Optional Protocol sets the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities, for recruitment into armed groups and for compulsory recruitment by Governments at 18 years. Furthermore, our national children's act and national defence force policy are in line with the Optional Protocol, in that they define the age of majority as 18 years, which is also in line with the South African Constitution. The children's act recognizes the need for special care and protection from harm, abuse and neglect of children. It gives effect to South Africa's commitments in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is vital that we do not forget the long-term needs of children who have been affected by armed conflict. South Africa therefore underscores the importance of adopting a broad strategy with regard to conflict prevention, which should address the root causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner and create a conducive environment for the protection and promotion of children's rights.

South Africa welcomes the unwavering commitment of the Office of the Special Representative and of UNICEF in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which will go a long way in addressing the recruitment and use of children and other violations committed in armed conflict. We encourage them to work within their respective mandates and in an integrated manner with other key stakeholders, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, concerned Member States and non-governmental organizations, to ensure coherence in addressing this scourge.

We also commend the work of the Security Council Working Group, especially its role to review progress in the development and implementation of time-bound action plans by parties to conflict to halt the recruitment and use of children, which are violations of international obligations.

In conclusion, South Africa would like to express our continued commitment to working with Council members and the international community to ensure that the protection of children remains our main priority.