Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict
September 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by **Ms. Power** *Permanent Mission of the* **United States** *to the United Nations.*

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, Special Envoy Whitaker, Deputy Executive Director Brandt, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous, Foreign Minister Asselborn and Sandra Uwiringiyimana for speaking with us today and for their tireless efforts on behalf of the world's children.

We have heard a lot of statistics measuring the massive scale of this problem. They include 3 million kids out of school in Syria and 9,000 children recruited to fight in South Sudan. Many of my colleagues have rightly spoken to the enduring big-picture problems we have to address, such as sexual violence and attacks on schools. Amid so many numbers and issues, it is easy to forget that we are talking about a lot of individual children — boys, girls and infants who suffer these deplorable injustices. As the last speaker among the Council members, I should like to tell three stories in the hope of reminding us that, no matter how hard we are working to protect children, we have to work harder.

An 18-year old woman from Mosul, in northern Iraq, relayed in a whisper what happened after she was abducted by armed men from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The fighters took her to a village called Kocho, where they separated the men and boys over 12 from the women, girls and younger boys. This young woman, just 18, was forced to watch as the fighters massacred the men and older boys. Then her captors took her back to Mosul, where she said she was held with more than 300 Yazidi girls and women. They were locked up, two or three to a room. Every day, the routine was the same; they were told to shower, and then the men came to rape them. The young woman had managed to hide a cell phone before the fighters abducted her, and she called a family member from captivity to tell her story. That was on 20 August, just a few weeks ago. It is the last news we have of this young woman.

Matthew, aged 16, was in math class in January in Bentiu, South Sudan, when rebel fighters raided his school. Matthew is an ethnic Nuer, as are most inhabitants of his village. The armed men told Matthew, one of some 300 students there, that the students were being taken away to fight against the Government, led by the rival Dinka group. Matthew did not want to fight, but he was told that his family would be killed if he refused. He gave in, and was taken for military training. He learned how to march, find cover and shoot. One night when he was sent to gather firewood, he fled and eventually reached a United Nations camp, where he told his story to Al-Jazeera. He is afraid that fighters will catch him if he leaves the United Nations site. "If they find me, they will kill me", he says.

Abu Ibrahim lost his wife and four of his children when the Syrian regime struck his home in Ghouta with a barrel bomb in April 2013. His only surviving child — a 10-year-old boy — nearly died from shrapnel wounds in his leg, head and chest. For eight months, a desperate Abu Ibrahim carried his son from city to city in Syria seeking medical help. In January, he finally made it to Amman, where his son was treated. When I met Abu Ibrahim in a refugee camp in June, his son's physical wounds were healing, but the boy was still deeply traumatized. He had not been to school in over a year.

These are just three of the 23 places covered by the report on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339), where children have been the victims of violence. There are many places — Pakistan, Palestine and Israel, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan and so many other countries. What is happening to the 18-year-old girl and other Yazidi captives in Iraq, to Matthew in South Sudan and to Abu Ibrahim's children is part of a disturbing pattern.

First, we are seeing the continuing rise of extremist groups that are openly hostile to children's rights, and particularly the rights of girls. Girls captured by groups like Boko Haram and ISIL are being sold into markets, given to fighters as so-called brides or kept as sex slaves. Secondly, as others have noted, we have a repeat offender problem. Thirty-one of the 59 armed groups listed in the report have been named in the report for the past five years and 11 of those persistent perpetrators have been named in every single report issued by the Secretary-General since the Office of the Special Representative began issuing reports in 2002.

We have to do better in protecting kids. One key step is condemning in a single, unified voice those abuses. Resolution 7129 (2014), which was adopted by the Council in March and condemns military use of schools, is one example. The only battles fought in schools should be battles over ideas. We also need to try to work with all groups — State and non-State — to set concrete, time-bound action plans to root out those practices. That can be especially challenging with non-State groups, but in 2013, nine non-State groups issued public statements or command orders prohibiting the use of child soldiers. Last month, the Free Syrian Army sent a letter to the Council announcing it had banned the use of child soldiers and pledging to punish child recruiters.

As the persistent perpetrator problem makes clear, global campaigns, action plans and trainings will not do it alone. As Sandra told us today so movingly, perpetrators have to be held accountable. Groups that fail to change their behaviour must be hit where it hurts. The United Nations can apply that pressure, of course. So can individual countries. In 2008, the United States passed the Child Soldier Prevention Act, which limits United States military assistance to Governments that recruit or use child soldiers.

Chad provides an example of how multilateral pressure can bring about real change. Last year, a chorus of actors pressed Chad to address its child soldier problem in the run-up to re-hatting its peacekeepers for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. Chad responded by setting up child-protection units in its military, conducting age verification reviews of its troops with the United Nations and signing a presidential decree making 18 the minimum recruitment age, among other steps. As a result, Chad was taken off the list of abusive parties in the Secretary-General's annual report. Now, that does not mean that our work is finished, but real progress has been made. Governments can change, and when they do, so do the lives of kids.

We were all so moved today by Sandra's story. She is a child, as she described it, born into war. She is a girl driven from her school and her home, who witnessed her relatives gunned down in cold blood in a refuge that they thought was safe. But the most defining part of Sandra's story is not the trembling, 10-year-old girl who said that what she feared was her last prayer at the barrel of a gun. The defining feature is the young woman who, with tremendous strength and determination, addressed the United Nations today. A young woman who spoke not of revenge, but of justice. A young woman who has already done so

much to assist children recovering from experiences like hers and dedicated herself to changing the world so fewer children endure such horrors.

To see Sandra today is to see the potential of all the children out there whose destinies hang in the balance in today's conflicts. There are so many of them — Sandras held captive in Nigeria, Sandras suffering through humanitarian blockades in Syria and Sandras fleeing massacres in the Central African Republic. They are children who, like Sandra, have a world to change. We must do more to ensure that they can.