

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict
18 June 2015, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Carlos Morales, Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations

(Spoke in Spanish): We would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and his delegation for having organized this open debate and for his concept note (S/2015/402, annex), which contains valuable guidance to focus our discussions today on those who are most vulnerable, that is, children. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and the representative of civil society for their very powerful briefings.

In the past year we have seen a disproportionate increase in suffering, mass abduction, violent attacks, the use of children as human shields and in suicide attacks. Such abuses are not only a violation of international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights law, but also represent an affront to our humanity, deprive our children of the hope of a better world and have devastating consequences for victims and their families, as well as the communities where they live.

There is room for improvement in the Security Council's comprehensive strategy for protection, prevention and response vis-à-vis children, who are at greater risk in armed conflict because they are the objects of abduction and recruitment by armed groups and are victims of abuse, rape and sexual exploitation. We must ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration through educational and training programmes, in keeping with the principle of the best interests of the child and respecting the overriding status of the child as a victim.

With respect to the release of child soldiers by armed groups, this is only the first step in the process of reintegration. We must also address the resulting trauma so as to prevent any repetition of the cycle of conflict. In this respect, we urge Governments and the international community as a whole to ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes receive the resources necessary to be able to function effectively.

We welcome the fact that through the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, eight Governments have committed to putting an end to and preventing the recruitment and use of children in national security forces by the end of 2016. Accountability is crucial to preventing such serious violations and must be at the very core of national and international responses. We must ensure that the necessary political and financial support is made available so as to ensure the institutionalization and sustainability of the progress made to date. We urge those that have not yet done so to sign and endorse a United Nations action plan.

We must put an end to the military use of schools by armed groups. Initiatives such as the Lucens Guidelines can help to prevent the military use of schools and universities, as they call on both State and non-State actors to immediately cease their attacks and threats against schools and to refrain from actions that hinder children's access to education. Along these lines, we welcome the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration, on 29 May, in Oslo, Norway.

We firmly condemn the use of explosive weapons in densely populated urban areas, because this increases the vulnerability of children, resulting in an increased number of deaths and incidents of mutilation, as well as prolonged suffering, destruction and chaos. We must incorporate provisions concerning the protection of children in ceasefire negotiations as well as peace agreements.

We also unreservedly condemn the appalling acts committed by extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Boko Haram, as well as the mass abductions of children carried out in recent months in Nigeria, Syria and Iraq. We reiterate our call for the immediate release of the boys and girls who are still being held captive. In that context, we support the addition of child abduction as one of the violations that could trigger listing within the annexes to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict.

While Guatemala believes that in these reports the emphasis should be placed on the victims rather than on the countries involved, we deem regrettable the inconsistencies contained in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409), because the serious human rights violations perpetrated against children in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel are not mentioned in the annex to that document. We must be the voice of the voiceless and ensure for them the protection and justice that they deserve. In some cases, such as that of Colombia, we have seen tangible progress in the quest for peace that will benefit the most vulnerable and that our region welcomes.

I wish to highlight the importance of Member States improving their cooperation at every level through the sharing of intelligence and information so as to develop best practices to prevent, document and address violations against children in armed conflict.

The fight against impunity must remain a pivotal aspect of our efforts, not only in the context of reacting to grave violations against children but also in preventing them.

We must take advantage of and improve the tools available to the Council and use them consistently so as to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, by including them in sanctions regimes, redoubling our efforts to enhance national capacities in the judicial sector and strengthening the international justice framework by, inter alia, referring perpetrators to the International Criminal Court.

The sentencing of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo and the referral to the Court of the Bosco Ntaganda case are clear messages concerning the penal consequences of child recruitment, which is considered a war crime. We are in favour of strengthening our dialogue with the Court and its mandate in this area.

We call on the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to ensure that the armed groups listed in the annexes to his annual report are informed of such listings and ensure that action plans are implemented that are aimed at putting an end to such violations. We also call upon all Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three optional Protocols.