

**Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2012,**  
**Security Council Chamber**

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I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to participate today. Let me begin by thanking in absentia Radhika Coomaraswamy and Alain LeRoy for all of their work. I also want to heartily welcome our new partnership with Leila Zerrougui and Hervé Ladsous. We very much look forward to ever stronger work together in this tremendously important field. Let me also thank Germany and you, Mr. President, for your devoted, even passionate, work in this cause and all your work as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

More than ever — under the leadership of the Council, the Secretary-General, you, Mr. President, and so many others — the issue of children and armed conflict is getting more of the focus, attention and action that it deserves, as participants you heard from my colleagues. But it deserves still more.

In a child's eyes one will find the light of hope and of promise for the future. But look into the eyes of former child soldiers, or the eyes of children who have suffered from terrible abuses, or even the eyes of those who have simply witnessed the horrors of war. That light is still shadowed by fear, pain and the terrible knowledge of humanity at its worst. Those children have seen too much, too soon.

An orphan boy from a small village recruited at gunpoint to become a soldier, handed a gun of his own to recruit others, blinded by prejudice and hate, trained to kill without emotion. A girl living through the horror of rape. A boy robbed of his legs after stepping on a landmine planted outside his school. A sick, bed-ridden child waiting for medicine that will never arrive in her village because soldiers stand in the way.

The world is making progress in holding perpetrators of such acts accountable. The recent verdicts against Thomas Lubanga by the International Criminal Court, and against Charles Taylor by the Sierra Leone Special Court, for example, demonstrate global progress against impunity and for justice. But accountability runs in many directions. Just as perpetrators need to be held accountable for the fate of children in conflict zones, so do Governments, and so do we.

The nine resolutions adopted by the Council since

1999 represent a clear commitment to accountability and action on behalf of children trapped in the horror of conflict. That includes last year's ground-breaking resolution 1998 (2011) to make attacks on schools and hospitals an automatic trigger for listing parties in the Secretary-General's report.

The United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism is also built around accountability and a commitment to end grave abuses of children's rights. The information on violations collected by United Nations task forces around the world is helping us to shape timely and appropriate responses in regions blighted by conflict, and to meet our goal of protecting all children.

U NICEF is working closely with Governments and communities to protect and rehabilitate children affected by conflict. In addition to monitoring and reporting violations, we are offering a range of responses, including mine-risk education, psychosocial support, vocational training, assistance to survivors of sexual violence and help for children who are being reintegrated into society after their association with armed forces and groups.

We must recognize that the future of those children hangs in the balance. We cannot leave them to fend for themselves. This is our commitment and our accountability. The responsibility of Governments to their citizens, and of citizens to each other, is most fully measured by their accountability to the most vulnerable in their societies. They must therefore support efforts to monitor, report and respond to grave violations against children and their rights.

Governments and others must allow United Nations involvement to help them establish national systems to prevent sanctions violations and deliver the right response services to those who need them without delay. Those actions cannot take place in isolation. They can only be effective through the active involvement of all those concerned, including Governments and communities, as well as the engagement even of those responsible for perpetuating violations against children. That work includes negotiations with armed forces and groups to secure the release of children who have been recruited, sometimes abducted and forced into combat.

In Mali, for instance, U NICEF and our partners have engaged with community leaders who are in active contact with armed parties to the conflict to advocate for children's rights and to end child recruitment. In the Central African Republic we are working with three armed groups with whom we have signed action plans to release children from their ranks. Similar efforts are under way in Afghanistan, Chad, Myanmar, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan and elsewhere.

This work is enormously complex, especially in situations involving cross-border conflicts and refugee flows into neighbouring countries. For the United Nations it demands that we leave room for negotiation and walk a fine line — between our hunger for justice and our thirst for peace, between our work on prevention and our work to rehabilitate the victims, and between our outrage at the perpetrators and our need to persuade them.

In short, there is a natural tension at the heart of U NICEF's efforts to deliver impartial humanitarian assistance while protecting and advocating for children's rights. That work, of course, is not only inherently intense, it is also resource-intensive, especially as we establish the monitoring and reporting mechanism in new situations and implement various action plans with parties to the conflicts.

As we accept those necessary costs and ask for help in managing them, we will always keep our eyes on our ultimate goals, namely, protecting, rehabilitating and upholding the rights of

children trapped in conflict zones. When one meets one of these children face-to-face, as many of us have, one notices something extraordinary. A few kind words; a welcoming ear of an adult who is not there to take advantage of them or to cast judgment upon them; an offer of food, water or medicine — those simple gestures can bring her or his guard down, even for just a moment. Despite the horrors endured, there is resilience there, a glimmer of gritty hope.

These children are not beyond our reach. Our message to them must be that none of us will not turn away; that our resolve to bring perpetrators to justice will not falter; and that every one of us accepts the burden of accountability.