

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

***Statement by Mr. Grauls, Permanent Representative to Belgium***

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (spoke in French): I thank you, Sir, for having organized this important event, which underscores once again the importance that the Security Council and the entire international community give to the protection of children who are victims of armed conflict.

Belgium welcomes the excellent report of the Secretary-General (S/2011/250) that Ms. Coomaraswamy presented to us and the practical recommendations that it contains. I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her tireless commitment. We welcome with enthusiasm the establishment of the fourth criterion for acknowledgement, namely recurrent attacks against schools or hospitals. This development is an important step in terms of strengthening the normative framework regarding children and armed conflicts. Moreover, I would like to congratulate the German presidency of the Council and you yourself, Sir, as well as the other members of the Council for its important decisions. As you know, Belgium was happy to co-sponsor this resolution.

I would like to illustrate the topic of this debate with the case of children in the Central African Republic, on the basis of my experience as Chairman of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. Regarding the situation throughout the Central African Republic, I would like to very briefly make five points.

First, with respect to the LRA — the Lord's Resistance Army — it still runs rampant in the south-east of the country, where it is to this day recruiting children as soldiers or sex slaves. Those who manage to escape it are in urgent need of psycho-social support. The communities who welcome them also need humanitarian support, instruction and medical care, and just as urgently. Above all, this problem requires a regional response.

Secondly, in the north-west of the country, more than 500 children have been demobilized from the ranks of the Armée populaire pour la restauration de la République et la démocratie, the APRD. Nonetheless, there is still no assistance provided for these children through a reintegration programme that would go beyond, and last longer than, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. That is my second point: the demobilization of child soldiers must go hand-in-hand with reintegration programmes.

Thirdly, in the north-east of the country, on 12 June the Government concluded a ceasefire agreement with the Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix, the CPJP. Through that agreement, which should facilitate humanitarian access, one of the recommendations of the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic (S/2011/241) is taking effect. And that is my third point: the reports of the Special Representative are having tangible effects.

Fourthly, given the enormity of the challenges in terms of protecting children, I noted, during my numerous visits to Bangui, that the United Nations system is lacking in resources and capabilities. While the Council prepares to include attacks against schools and hospitals as a criterion to be taken into account, it must be remembered that strengthening the system at the level of principle, an expansion of triggers, is not sufficient. We should also ensure that those who work to protect children have the necessary resources and capabilities to carry out their duties. Without that, the gap between the observed needs and the support provided will only widen in countries such as the Central African Republic, where attacks against schools and hospitals are undeniably still being perpetrated today.

Fifthly and finally, I wish to underscore the existence of two categories of child victims of armed conflicts who do not receive the attention they deserve: children born of rape, who are often treated as pariahs by society, and those who witnessed the rapes of their mothers, their sisters or other members of their family. To date this is a forgotten matter in the Central African Republic, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. I know that Ms. Coomaraswamy is aware of the existence of these two categories, who have so far been forgotten or neglected, and is determined to give them all necessary attention. I wish in particular to commend the decision of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Bangui to

strengthen the work of the United Nations to protect children as soon as she arrived a few weeks ago. Her team has already made a very important initial step by relaunching the work of the technical-level inter-agency group on the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave child rights violations. The mechanism is finally up and running in Bangui. In conclusion, I wish to welcome the efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to set up a national council for the protection of children, and I encourage it to implement the recommendations in the first report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa (S/2009/66), especially in the area of children and armed conflict.