

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

Statement by Mrs. Viotti, Representative of Brazil

I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on convening this important debate. I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks, and I am also grateful to Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy and to Mr. Anthony Lake for their presentations today and for their invaluable work on this important issue.

Shielding children from the horrors of conflict is an important dimension of the Council's efforts to protect civilians, to break the cycle of conflict and to establish sustainable peace. We welcome resolution 1998 (2011), adopted today, and its focus on addressing attacks against schools and hospitals. Education and health are basic human rights and building blocks of peaceful societies. To attack them is to attack the very notion of human dignity.

The Council has developed an important body of norms on children and armed conflict that constitute useful tools to protect civilians. They have led to progress in curbing grave violations against children. Nevertheless, much remains to be done to make our work both more efficient and more effective. We commend the German chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and support a continued reflection on how to better use the tools at the Group's disposal to protect children.

When dealing with situations of armed conflict, respect for international humanitarian law must be our core concern. It is neither necessary nor desirable for the Council to create a new set of norms to discipline the actions of parties in conflict. In cases where international humanitarian law is being violated, the Council may decide that a more direct involvement is necessary to protect the most vulnerable.

International humanitarian law is clear in regard to attacks on schools and hospitals. Teachers, students, patients and medical personnel are civilians and therefore protected persons under international humanitarian law. The Council has time and again reiterated the responsibility of all parties to conflict to protect civilians. We must avoid selectivity and be consistent in our demands for strict observance of international humanitarian law.

In cases outside the purview of the Council, where there is no armed conflict, Member States should support national and international mechanisms to promote children's rights. Where, in turn, there is an armed conflict, the Council's efforts to protect children must be closely linked to its broader goal to maintain international peace and security. The signing of action plans and the release of child soldiers are very important achievements, but our ultimate goal must be to end the conflicts that have given rise to such violations.

Sustainable peace is the best guarantee of lasting protection. Brazil will continue to firmly support the Council's efforts both to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict and to help lay the foundations of long-term peace.