

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

Statement by Ms. Holguín Cuéllar, Representative of Colombia

At the outset I would like to thank Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy for her briefing and report and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF.

It is a pleasure for my delegation to join the Council in this important debate. We are grateful for the opportunity to share with the Member States of the United Nations our vision of this problem, which we know close up. Therefore we believe we can contribute to a better understanding of this matter, given our experience and the measures we have undertaken. We know that the decisions the Council makes, if focused correctly, have an effect on the solutions that States are able to provide.

The welfare of children affected by conflict must be the central motivation that brings us together to find definitive solutions. Policies of prevention and cooperation undoubtedly are more effective than finger-pointing and excluding Governments from the debate, from the exchange of information and from the search for solutions.

Since resolution 1612 (2005) of July 2005, it has been recognized that the monitoring and reporting mechanism must operate with the participation of and in cooperation with national Governments and relevant United Nations and civil society actors. In this instance, the Council has once more reiterated the primary role of Governments in the protection and rehabilitation of children and has reaffirmed that all actions undertaken by United Nations entities must be designed to support and supplement the efforts of national Governments.

What has happened in recent years is that the Governments of affected countries have been excluded from the debate and the working mechanisms. This trend takes us farther away from definitive solutions with regard to the protection of affected children, because it is Governments that must take corrective actions. In this context, we would like to underline that, as stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2011/250), the results so far obtained are the product of actions by Governments, peace processes or the end of conflicts.

Resolution 1612 (2005) indicates that the monitoring and reporting mechanism must support and complement the capacity of national Governments for the protection and rehabilitation of children. Since 2005, when the mechanism was created, there has not been much progress towards solutions, but there has been an increase in blaming. We believe that strengthening each country's capacities — an fundamental principle of the United Nations response to this problem — has been insufficient. The United Nations must go further than denouncing; it must use its experience, working more decisively with States in the search for solutions.

Allow me to speak in a blunt and realistic way. It is entirely naive to think that the United Nations or any other multilateral organization can change the minds of terrorist organizations that for decades have struck fear in civilian populations, that profit from illicit activities, that utilize terror as a modus operandi, that use children as their tools to those ends and that have always ignored national and international norms. For that reason Colombia believes that the stated intention of agencies of the United Nations system to attempt to talk to those groups directly and without the consent of Governments is inadmissible and unacceptable.

Colombia is a State where the rule of law prevails, a solid democracy where we fight to have a peaceful country, and to spare our population the nightmare of illegal armed groups financed by drug trafficking. I reiterate this point today because this year it was discussed by the Group of Experts.

We are convinced that we would have more results if the United Nations realized that it could strengthen the goal of protecting children affected by recruitment if it maintained its commitment to national Governments. That commitment is fulfilled through the cooperation and participation of the Governments. In this context, we do not share the generalities of these resolutions, since every situation is different and particular. Developing lists creates difficulties and complicates the search for solutions for each country. We stated this in 2005, and time and the state of this debate today have proven us right. Progress is made through concrete projects fitted to the realities of each society and each situation.

Without a doubt, changing the focus to emphasize cooperation and dialogue among the Members of this Organization, working in countries in a way that respects the guiding principles of the United Nations, and turning Governments into allies in the promotion and protection of the rights of children affected by this plague is the way to achieve results and to have no more children deprived of freedom. We hope for greater understanding that we, the Member States and the United Nations, can work together on the same path. Only in this way will their work be strengthened.

Colombia has implemented a prevention plan. We have always believed that prevention should guide the actions of the Council and the United Nations. Unfortunately, neither this resolution nor the other ones on the matter have considered prevention as a strategy in its central policies, missing the opportunity to carry out actions so that children may truly have a different life with opportunities and a future.

For many years we have been promoting the issue of the rights of children in local and regional policies. We receive our greatest support from the International Organization for Migration, to whom we extend once again our gratitude for the way in which it has, over the years, made the effort to work on this issue with our Government. That is why we have proposed to the United Nations system that it work under one single plan in a comprehensive manner and to focus on 29 municipalities that are especially vulnerable to recruitment by illegal armed groups. I appreciate the support of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whose help has been essential to getting the system in Colombia to commit to carrying out this project. In the coming months, several projects will be running with a social, educational, recreational and training focus to provide opportunities for children and young people in at-risk areas.

With that in mind, and considering the best way to attain results, we propose that a serious and unpoliticized evaluation of the effect and implementation of the resolutions on this matter be carried out. Such an evaluation must include a review of the mechanism in order to assess its effectiveness. We consider a review imperative, because we have been discussing this issue for a decade with few results. Colombia, whose children have been the victims of these practices and who has combated them for many years, considers that an in-depth reflection concerning this painful subject is in order.