

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict
Wednesday, 16th June 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Ambassador Viinanen, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The Nordic countries are heartened that, during the past few years, the number of conflicts in which child soldiers have been used has decreased. International attention and efforts to eliminate the use of child soldiers and alleviate the suffering of children in situations of armed conflict have intensified. This is largely due to the excellent work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. We would like to reiterate our deep appreciation for her tireless efforts to call perpetrators to account and to further develop the international mechanisms to bring an end to this scourge. We would also like to take this opportunity to commend UNICEF for its worldwide efforts to ensure the protection of all children, including through its leadership of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

At the same time, we have to note that the positive developments have less to do with the efforts of the international community than with the fact that certain armed conflicts in which the use of child soldiers had persisted have come to an end. It is particularly disheartening that human rights violations against children are repeated when new crises and armed conflicts flare up. We need to address the root causes of such violations and put an end to human rights abuses.

I wish to focus my remarks today on three issues that the Secretary-General has emphasized in his recommendations to the Council. The first is strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to gather information to ensure that the Council gets timely, accurate and verified information from complex situations on the ground. The second is allowing the United Nations to work with non-State actors in addressing grave violations against children to ensure that action is taken when violations have been reported. The third is how to take decisive action in cases where violations persist despite repeated condemnations.

The Nordic countries appreciate the fact that, for the first time, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2010/181) lists parties that have committed either sexual violence or killed or maimed children. The capacity needed for gathering, verifying and analyzing the information on these crimes is recognized in the report. The Nordic countries support what the Secretary-General in his report calls a conservative approach taken this year in determining the parties to be listed for these violations and the self-critical approach in acknowledging the difficulties in information collection. For us, this demonstrates that the Office of the Special Representative, the country task forces and all relevant United Nations and non-United Nations partners are guided by very high standards of accuracy and verification, despite the often complex situations on the ground.

Nordic countries — both Governments and civil society — have been committed supporters of UNICEF since its establishment. UNICEF leads the work of the existing 14 monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the ground. We are encouraged by the good cooperation between UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative. We would like to see a similar close relationship develop with actors working on women and peace and security, in particular the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We also support the involvement of child protection specialists in the preparation and planning of peacebuilding and peacekeeping missions, as well as systematic inclusion of Child Protection Advisers in all peacekeeping operations and political and peacebuilding missions.

Information on grave violations is not collected and verified for the sake of having the information but for action to be taken in response, in order to make a difference to children's lives. We welcome the fact that in the course of last year the development of and agreement to action plans by three non-State armed groups has led to the demobilization of several thousand child soldiers. These action plans are a strong example of why allowing contacts between the United Nations and non-State actors for the purposes of addressing grave violations of children's rights is so crucial. We join the call of the Secretary-General on all Governments concerned to allow the United Nations to work with non-State actors for effective protection of children.

The presence of the Afghan National Police on the list in annex I of the report of the Secretary-General represents a special case for the Nordic countries. Several Nordic countries actively support the Afghan National Police as part of the effort to enhance the human rights and security situation in the country. We are encouraged by the steps taken so far by

the Afghan Government to address the issue of recruitment of children, and we stand ready to support the Afghan National Police to that end.

Unfortunately, there are also cases where the Security Council does not lack information but where the violations continue nonetheless. The Nordic countries express great concern that parties continue to commit grave violations, and we appreciate that for the first time the Secretary-General's report has a separate list of persistent violators: those parties to a conflict who have been listed for grave violations against children for five or more consecutive years. The Nordic countries believe it is time for the Security Council to step up its response against these persistent violators. It should also consider more effective measures in response to grave violations in general. We support the proposals of the Secretary-General to include child recruitment and its use in the mandate of all sanctions committees, to improve the flow of information between the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the sanctions committees and to invite the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict to regularly brief the sanctions committees.

In this regard we have been encouraged to hear that the Special Representative was recently invited to brief the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we hope that the Security Council will decide to make this a regular practice.

Lastly, the fight against impunity, including through our continuing support for the International Criminal Court, is of course both a preventive and a responsive measure to combat grave violations against children.