

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict 19th of September 2012,
Security Council Chamber

Statement by Herve Ladsous , Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations at the United Nations

(spoke in French): I would like to begin by thanking the Government of Germany for inviting us to participate in this open debate. Speaking to you personally, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your leadership and achievements as the Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

I would also like to congratulate Ms. Zerrougui on her appointment as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is firmly committed to supporting her work as the independent and moral advocate for children affected by armed conflict. Throughout the years, the Office of the Special Representative has provided excellent leadership and established strategic partnerships with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNICEF and the broader United Nations system. This unique partnership has enabled us to lean on the comparative strength of each actor in order to provide comprehensive and real protection for children on the ground, as this is, after all, about them.

(spoke in English): As a key part of this unique partnership, our multidimensional peacekeeping operations are of course uniquely placed to contribute to the actual protection of children affected by conflict. They provide a common platform that combines political, justice, human rights, gender, child protection and other civilian expertise with military, police and corrections experts and myriad logistical and operational capabilities.

The deployment of child protection advisers to our peacekeeping operations, with the support of the Security Council, has enabled us to harness all of our capacities and to leverage our political, security and civilian assets to better protect children.

First, at the political level, child protection advisers support heads of missions in integrating the United Nations child protection concerns at all stages of the peace process, including negotiations with Governments, armed groups or parties to conflict. Take the example of the Sudan, where, following broad political consultations held between the Mission and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) earlier this year, JEM issued a command order last week prohibiting the recruitment and use of child soldiers. JEM has thus become the seventh armed movement in Darfur to have taken such a significant step since 2010.

Secondly, our military peacekeepers actually play an important role in protecting children from violations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where I myself was last week, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) military units and observers deployed in remote areas have contributed to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children by providing information, security and critical logistical support for their release. Since the beginning of this year, for instance, MONUSCO has documented the release of no less than 1,038 children through the assistance of

peacekeepers. In the past four months alone, at least 38 children have escaped from the March 23 Movement in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as Ms. Zerrougui mentioned, and sought refuge and protection with peacekeepers. These children were handed over to UNICEF and partners for reintegration support.

Thirdly, our child protection advisers are working closely with all civilian components, such as those dealing with human rights, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, rule of law, justice, protection of civilians coordinators, women protection advisers, gender and security sector reform to promote synergies and a child-sensitive approach to their work.

An important area where the mission harnesses its broad capacities, including the military, police and civilian components, is in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. These diverse components refer cases and provide critical information on grave violations to United Nations country task forces, which enables the mission leadership and child protection actors to respond appropriately and support the important work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which you chair, Mr. President.

All of those efforts can have a real and sustainable impact when we work closely with national authorities. An excellent example of this partnership was the recent renewal of the action plan to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers signed by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) with UNICEF, the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in March 2012. As a result, the SPLA has screened out 429 children at recruitment sites and ordered its military units to vacate all occupied schools immediately. Today, 11 out of 16 schools have indeed been vacated, and efforts are under way to vacate the remaining five. These achievements are a testament to how concerted action at all levels can result in better protection for children in conflict zones.

Although we have made significant progress in providing protection for children, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2012/261) illustrates that more needs to be done. One of our priorities moving forward is to ensure that we maximize our resources to improve our interventions. We believe that training is an important tool to achieve this. Indeed, in different missions, training on child protection for all military, police and civilians is a top priority. This year alone, over 9,000 peacekeepers received awareness training on child protection in our peacekeeping missions. With the generous support of several Member States, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is leading the updating of training materials for peacekeepers. Those training tools will be ready in 2013.

A second priority is the update of the DPKO policy on child protection. We are working jointly with the Office of the Special Representative and with the Department of Political Affairs to reflect the most recent developments in the child protection agenda, and the broader protection agenda since 2009, and to strengthen our collective efforts in this regard.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our firm commitment to the protection of children

in conflict. Under the leadership of the Special Representative, in partnership with U NICEF, we are deeply committed to ensuring the full implementation of Security Council resolutions. Jointly, we believe that indeed we can deliver tangible and lasting peace for vulnerable children whose lives are so often disrupted by conflict. As always, we look to the Council's mandate and support to achieve that.