

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

Statement by Mr. Al Bayati, Representative of Iraq

Please allow me, at the outset, Mr. President, to express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General on the presentation of his annual report to the Security Council on children in armed conflict (S/2011/250). We also appreciate the important role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Child and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in monitoring the state of children in armed conflict. I would also like to thank Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, for his presence and remarks. I commend the Security Council for adopting resolution 1998 (2011) today.

In her speech this morning, Special Representative Coomaraswamy stated, "During my visits to conflict areas, I have personally seen the devastation — schools completely destroyed, bombed or burnt to the ground. I have also seen schools with broken window panes and empty classrooms where children have been recruited as child soldiers. I have met girls whose colleagues stay away from schools because, as female students, they may be victims of acid attacks."

I would like to state that nothing like that is happening in Iraq, because Iraq is not a conflict area. However, my delegation is pleased to make the following observations about the section on Iraq in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict.

The report covers the situation during 2010 and emphasizes that children were used by the terrorist group Al-Qaida and the affiliated terrorist group, the Islamic State of Iraq. We would like to note that the security situation in Iraq has continued to improve since 2003. The year 2010 witnessed a very low rate of terrorist attacks and casualties, as a result of the growing capabilities of the Iraqi security forces, the pursuit of Al-Qaida and pre-emptive strikes against it, and the capture of most of its leaders in Iraq.

The year 2010 also witnessed the killing of Al-Qaida in Iraq leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri and the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, who were both killed in mid-April 2010. These strikes and arrests have dispersed Al-Qaida's strength, disrupted its strategies and revealed to Iraqi security agencies Al-Qaida's plans, thus weakening Al-Qaida's ability to finance and recruit terrorists in Iraq.

The year 2010 witnessed a lot of security achievements, the most prominent of which was the safe atmosphere surrounding the general election held on 7 March, which clearly indicated the great improvement in Iraq's security situation and the growing capabilities of the Iraqi security forces to maintain order throughout the country. The Secretary-General mentioned this fact in his report to the Security Council on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), stating that "the overall environment in which the poll was conducted was relatively free of violence and without any major security incidents that affected the polling itself" (S/2010/240, *para. 6*).

In paragraph 16 of the same report, the Secretary-General further states that "the Iraqi security forces have demonstrated their increased capacity to assume greater security responsibilities, evidenced by their successful maintenance of security during the March elections".

Paragraph 97 of the report contained in document S/2011/250 states that there were consistent reports from many parties during 2010 that Al-Qaida forces in Iraq were managing a wing of its organization called "Birds of Paradise". The same paragraph also refers to the difficulty in obtaining information concerning that group and identifying its leadership.

In that connection, we would like to note that the report covers the year 2010 and that the wing was discovered before 2010. According to reports from Iraqi security forces, the intensive security campaigns carried out by Iraqi forces at the beginning of 2010 resulted in the elimination of most of the forces of Al-Qaida, the dismantling of the majority of cells and the arrest of its leaders, including members and leaders of the Birds of Paradise. This wing did not commit any terrorist attacks in 2010. We thus believe that there is no need to refer to this wing of the organization in this report.

Paragraph 97 of the same report also refers to information that was based on allegations and not evidence: “In other instances, insurgents have allegedly used children as proxy bombers who did not know they were carrying explosives”.

Paragraph 98 of the report indicates that a number of children were killed or injured as a result of the continued conflict in Iraq. In fact, the losses incurred in 2010 were the result of attacks carried out by terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and its affiliated groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq, and were not due to any conflict.

Paragraph 98 mentions that access to many parts of Iraq is limited and that the verification of all incidents was not possible. The United Nations thinks that the figure may underrepresent the actual numbers. What is stated in this paragraph gives a picture that is contrary to the reality of the Iraq situation in 2010, witnessed by the current stability and the inability of terrorists to have a public presence in any region of Iraq. The security forces control all areas of Iraq. Civilians and security forces have ease of movement, especially in areas that were previously reported to be dangerous.

Paragraph 98 also speaks about child casualties resulting from their presence in areas of armed clashes or during confrontation at checkpoints. We reiterate that the improvement in security in 2010 prevented direct clashes between security forces and terrorists because the terrorists have lost control of the ground as a result of the dismantling of their groups by security forces. Therefore, terrorists started to attack randomly and in a way that did not reveal them to the public.

Paragraph 99 refers to the danger that prevents children from going to schools, while paragraph 98 refers to the incident that took place at the Church of Our Lady of Salvation. The report states that some schools were closed in Baghdad for a few weeks because they were located next to churches. Throughout 2010, there were no general school closures, despite the fact that there were such closures for weeks in many countries throughout the world due to all kinds of disasters, such as floods, epidemics, hurricanes and so on.

The report does not mention the efforts made by the Iraqi Government to combat the remnants of terrorist groups and improve security in all areas of the country, nor its success in limiting the recruitment of children by terrorist groups. As I said earlier, we feel that the report’s section on Iraq is in need of more accuracy, especially as regards the monitoring of the situation of children in Iraq. This section of the report contradicts some information contained in reports of the Secretary-General on UNAMI that point to an improvement in the security situation in Iraq, including facts. We therefore hope that, in the future, the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict will be able to provide more accurate information in order to give a clear picture to members of the Security Council.

I would like to conclude by extending our thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her Office for their efforts. I would like to invite her to visit Iraq again. Since her last visit, three years ago, a lot of improvements have taken place in Iraq. We will continue to cooperate with United Nations bodies to ensure human rights in general and the rights of children in particular as priorities of the Iraqi Government.