

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

Statement by Mr. Nishida, Representative of Japan

I would like first to congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of the Security Council for this month of July. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General, his Special Representative Ms. Coomaraswamy and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Lake, for their comprehensive briefings. Japan very much appreciates the advocacy activities of Ms. Coomaraswamy, in particular her country visits, as well as the dedicated field work done by UNICEF in the area of children and armed conflict.

While there has been commendable progress, such as the signing of action plans by the Governments of Afghanistan and Chad this year with the United Nations to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, many challenges still remain on the agenda in terms of children and armed conflict, including sexual violence against children.

Based on Japan's two-year experience in the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, until the end of last year, I would like to focus on three issues that we regard as particularly important, namely, attacks on schools and hospitals, accountability for persistent perpetrators and a comprehensive approach.

First, Japan is deeply concerned about the reported trend of an increasing number of attacks on schools and hospitals during conflicts. We strongly condemn the perpetrators of such attacks, in particular those who target female students and girls' schools.

Attacks on and the military use of educational and medical facilities and attacks against pupils, teachers and medical personnel not only deprive children of their lives but also seriously violate a child's fundamental rights to access to educational and medical services. Such acts are not permissible under any circumstances, in particular in conflict situations. The Security Council should play a key role in protecting children's rights to education and health.

In that regard, we welcome that the new resolution just adopted by the Council (resolution 1998 (2011)), which Japan proudly sponsored, requests the Secretary-General to include in the annexes to his reports those parties that engage in recurrent attacks on schools and hospitals and against protected persons in relation to such facilities.

Secondly, Japan continues to be concerned about the fact that as many as 15 parties to conflict have been listed for more than five consecutive years in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports. In order to ensure accountability for persistent perpetrators, the Security Council must reinforce targeted measures against them, as the Council already agreed to impose seven years ago in resolution 1539 (2004).

We welcome the fact that, as a result of the briefing by Ms. Coomaraswamy in the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Committee included several individuals in its sanctions list for their grave violations against children. We encourage the holding of briefings on a more regular basis to the relevant sanctions committees by both the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We commend the German presidency and all Council members for addressing in very strong terms the issue of accountability for persistent perpetrators in the new resolution.

Thirdly, I would also like to underline the need to address the issue of children and armed conflict in a more comprehensive manner, through cooperation between Member States and the United Nations system. Support must be ensured seamlessly, from the protection of children in conflict to the rehabilitation, care and reintegration during peacebuilding efforts of those formerly associated with armed forces or groups and who are victims of sexual violence. Children's perspectives need to always be considered in the processes and programmes related to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts, as well as those associated with security sector reform, landmines, unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions.

We also expect that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, apart from just adopting conclusions on each situation annually, will be more creative in holding special meetings and issuing political messages in a timely manner in response to an urgent appeal by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

In its assistance to conflict and post-conflict countries, Japan has placed great importance on the protection and empowerment of children, who are the most vulnerable. For example, in cooperation with international partners, we have extended assistance in the areas of rehabilitating child victims of landmines and providing mine-risk education in countries such as Cambodia. Through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, Japan has also supported communitybased programmes that improve the educational environment and provide education and training for former child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By preventing and alleviating the deleterious impacts of conflict, we will continue to endeavour to enable children around the world to have a brighter future.