

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

Statement by Mrs. Ogwu, Representative of Nigeria

Let me convey Nigeria's profound appreciation to the German presidency of the Security Council for having convened this timely meeting on children and armed conflict. I commend your personal leadership, Mr. President, in planning and organizing this important meeting. Germany has not only demonstrated excellent leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, it has also taken a determined stance on compelling moral issues, including attacks on schools and hospitals in situations of armed conflict.

Let me also add Nigeria's voice to those who have expressed appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Coomaraswamy and Executive Director Anthony Lake for their inspiring statements. I must also thank the Secretary-General and his team for the painstaking and lucid report (S/2011/250) on the subject.

Over the past 12 years, significant progress has been made in identifying children at risk and engaging with those who would otherwise threaten their wellbeing and reintegrating and rehabilitating children who have been affected by war.

The development of the monitoring and reporting system, the steady growth in the implementation of action plans and the refocusing on the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law have in many instances made the world a safer, if not more peaceful, place for children.

In spite of these notable improvements, several challenges still exist. Of particular concern to most delegations, including mine, is the troubling trend of attacks and other violations against schools, hospitals, pupils and staff. It is critical that parties to armed conflict are made to recognize the special status such institutions enjoy as safe havens in time of conflict. That status must be inviolate. It must be inviolate, as impeded access to health care and education will have devastating and long-lasting humanitarian consequences. In protecting these safe havens, we recognize the human rights to education and health as enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There is indeed an accountability gap for violations against children affected by armed conflict, which we should breach. Impunity for violations against children, which remains an ever-present feature of conflicts, is a symptom of a wider issue of capacity. States involved in conflict are resource-starved and therefore lack the manpower to devote to the investigation of crimes against children. It is the obligation of the international community to adequately resource such Governments, provide the necessary technical assistance and guidance for the drafting and implementation of national action plans.

In addition, justice-sector capacity-building should constitute a vital part of our peacekeeping activity. In support of national efforts, the Security Council should be unremitting in applying these targeted measures against the perpetrators of grave violations against children. We must remain open to ensuring that the work of the Working Group benefits our wider policy bodies, including the sanctions committees, where appropriate. It is our sincere hope that the resolution adopted today will move beyond the incremental improvements made thus far and breach the accountability gap once and for all.

Nigeria unequivocally endorses the cooperative approach to child protection that features prominently in the report of the Secretary-General. We are unequivocal in our support for the highly effective partnership between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as the functional partnerships between UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The in-country task forces, peacekeeping operations and special political and peacebuilding missions should also be commended for their efforts to systematize approaches to child protection within their respective mandates. Their engagement with civil society and State actors is a prerequisite for long-term improvement in this regard. A notable model for such cooperation is the United Nations regional strategy on the protection of children affected by the Lord's Resistance Army.

Nigeria is a signatory to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and a founding signatory to the recent N'Djamena Declaration. We believe that these actions underscore our commitment to standards for the protection of children, particularly those who are vulnerable to armed conflict. We are and will remain an active participant in the effort to shield our young people, enforce their rights and, more importantly, to hold accountable those who violate those rights. It is our collective duty, we believe, and our vocation to protect the innocent and the vulnerable from the ravages of war. It may be helpful for us Council members to consider ourselves in loco parentis. We are, in fact, part of the larger community that it takes to raise and protect each and every child. Accordingly, we must all be watchful, vigilant and even fierce in our commitment to keep armed conflict from indelibly scarring our youth.