

Security Council Open Debate on Children in Armed Conflict, June 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Masood Khan, Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations.

We deeply appreciate Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui's remarkable work, undertaken in pursuance of her mandate, to implement the international legal framework for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. With a firm yet pragmatic approach, she has been able to obtain the cooperation of States and regional organizations. We welcome Deputy Prime Minister Jean Asselborn to the Council. Ambassador Sylvie Lucas and her team have done a splendid job in putting together a very comprehensive draft presidential statement. Luxembourg has conducted inclusive and skilful negotiations to bring all Council members on board.

Children are the most valuable resource we have. A society's soul is reflected in the way it treats its children. The United Nations Charter's adage "to save succeeding generations" urges us to invest in children's future, which is in fact our future. We know that millions of children are trapped in wars and conflicts. They are killed, maimed, raped and subjected to sexual violence. They are recruited, abducted and detained, and are coerced into becoming part of armed conflicts.

Some progress has been made to slow down this scourge, especially in developing norms and standards. Thousands of children have been demobilized, rehabilitated and reintegrated. Much more needs to be done to ensure compliance, fight impunity and protect children's rights in the face of new risks that come about as a result of the evolving nature of conflict.

As Ms. Zerrougui pointed out this morning, the absence of clear front lines and identifiable opponents and the tactics used by terrorist groups make children vulnerable in conflict situations. Children have been used as suicide bombers and human shields. Schools continue to be attacked, which particularly affects girls' education.

Persistent perpetrators of violence against children must be brought to justice through national judicial systems and, where applicable, the use of international justice arrangements.

The draft presidential statement to be adopted today sends a strong signal: the Council condemns all violations of applicable international law impinging on children's rights. It demands that all parties to conflict immediately put an end to such practices and take special measures to protect children.

In his report (S/2013/245), the Secretary-General refers to an increasing number of child casualties incurred through the use of armed drones. He has also called for adherence to the principles of precaution, distinction and proportionality and for transparent and effective investigations when child casualties occur. For its part, Pakistan believes that the use of armed drones violates sovereignty, causes civilian casualties and puts communities at risk of reprisal attacks. Drone strikes radicalize disaffected communities and increase the number of terrorists. Urgent and intense negotiations are needed to address the issue of armed drones.

Pakistan fully supports the mandate of the children and-armed-conflict mechanism, including its reporting and monitoring procedures. We want to strengthen the political consensus around that mandate to ensure better protection of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict. For that purpose, the legal parameters of the mandate must be respected. Focus should continue to remain on situations of armed conflict and those threatening international peace and security. We are encouraged by Ms. Zerrougui's outreach to Member States to understand and address their concerns in that regard.

The draft presidential statement to be adopted today clearly recognizes the primary role of Government, which is to be supported and supplemented by the United Nations, in providing protection and relief to children affected by armed conflict.

Before concluding, I would like to make the following suggestions.

Every effort should be made to ensure that the information collected through the monitoring and reporting mechanism is accurate and verifiable. The Council should finalize objective and balanced listing and delisting criteria, in full consultation with Member States. The terms “armed attacks” and “armed groups” should be replaced by “terrorist attacks” and “terrorist groups” in cases where a clear determination has been made that the attacks were launched by terrorist outfits. There is no need for legal euphemisms in that context.

Finally, I thank Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous, UNICEF Deputy Director Yoka Brandt and Save the Children Associate Vice-President Gregory Ramm for their statements. Their contributions have enriched our discussion in the Council.