

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

Statement by Mr. Gregory Ramm, Associate Vice-President of Save the Children.

I am honoured to speak alongside the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and colleagues from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and UNICEF. We are committed to working together to ensure greater protection for children and greater accountability for the grave violations perpetrated against them.

Save the Children works in dozens of countries affected by conflict, delivering life-saving assistance to millions of children and families in need. We see at first-hand the devastating impact and suffering of children in conflicts around the world. There are three areas that I would like to highlight today: sexual violence against children, the use of explosive weapons and attacks on schools. I also want to emphasize the importance of prevention as well as response.

Sexual violence affects millions of children in conflicts. Our research and programming indicate that the majority of the survivors of sexual violence in conflict-affected countries are children — mostly girls but also boys. Sexual violence has significant physical, psychological and social impacts on children, but their needs for specific protection and child-sensitive responses are frequently neglected. In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, our assessments in and around Goma have revealed significant numbers of children affected by sexual violence. Save the Children is working in the camps to identify victims so as to assist them with appropriate health and psychosocial services. More action is needed to end sexual violence, including legal reforms and adequate funding to support child-sensitive and appropriate responses. We call on Member States to place children at the centre of international action on sexual violence in conflict; to ensure the necessary resources, expertise and political backing for prevention and response; and to hold perpetrators accountable.

The use of explosive weapons in conflict has devastating consequences for children, who are killed and maimed in greater numbers as a result of such weapons. They are left with deep physical and psychological scars and are denied access to education and health care, owing to damaged infrastructure, and they end up displaced from their homes as families flee insecurity. In Syria, we witness those effects at first-hand. As one little girl told us:

“At the beginning ... there was no shelling at my school, but after some time the shelling started. I stopped going to school ... It was not safe. I feel sad that my school was burned.”

Save the Children calls on States to refrain from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects by revising and strengthening military policies and procedures; supporting the collection and sharing of data with the United Nations on the impact of such weapons on children; and holding to account those who use such weapons.

Save the Children is responding to the Syrian crisis and, to date, we have assisted over 300,000 children and their families inside Syria and in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. We are providing impartial, life-saving support, including food, clothing and essential items to improve health and hygiene. We run child-friendly spaces offering psychosocial support, education activities and a safe place to play. As the Secretary-General himself says, the toll of the conflict on children is “unacceptable and unbearable” (*S/2013/245, para. 208*). Security Council members must unite to work towards a negotiated settlement in Syria and, in the meantime, ensure that humanitarian assistance is funded and reaches populations most in need.

Schools are increasingly targets of attack, with children frequently killed or injured. Greater action is

needed in order to protect children, teachers and schools from targeted violence and to stop the use of schools for military purposes. In 2011, the Security Council adopted resolution 1998 (2011) to strengthen the monitoring and reporting mechanism so as to include attacks on schools and hospitals as a trigger for action. Save the Children calls on the Council to ensure that attacks on schools are acted upon in accordance with that resolution, so that victims receive support and future attacks are prevented. Schools must be respected by all parties as conflict-free zones, and measures must be taken to restrict their military use.

Humanitarian agencies like ours do all we can to assist victims of conflict, but we need the help of Governments and the Security Council to prevent children from becoming victims in the first place. In Mali, Save the Children is reuniting children separated from their families during the recent conflict, providing psychosocial support and strengthening community-based responses. Since 1998, we have trained thousands of military personnel, police force members and peacekeepers throughout Africa in child rights and protection. Currently, we are cooperating with UNICEF and DPKO to develop mandatory training on the protection of children for all United Nations peacekeepers worldwide, as noted earlier. When authorizing peacekeeping missions, the Security Council must require personnel to receive pre-deployment training in child protection, as in Mali, including the capacity to prevent and monitor grave violations against children.

Parties to conflict must abide by their international legal obligations and take measures to ensure that children are protected at all times. Member States must support efforts to ensure not only that grave violations are documented but also that perpetrators are held to account.

We applaud the Security Council's efforts to ensure the protection of children from the grave violations committed against them. We encourage the Security Council to ensure that the children and armed conflict agenda remains strong with future open debates. Children throughout the world need us to act to spare them from suffering before more violations occur.