

**Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict, March 7th, 2014, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Ms. Mejía Vélez, Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations*

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, the members of the Security Council, Ms. Zerrougui, and in particular Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh, who today put a face and a smile on the story of so many others in places, such as Colombia, where so many children have experienced these difficulties.

I believe it is especially significant that the first time that I am participating in a Security Council debate, we are dealing with the very delicate subject of children in armed conflict. That is why I should like to express my gratitude, on Colombia's behalf, for this invitation to participate in this open debate. For a country such as my own that has faced tremendous challenges as a result of armed conflict, this is a valuable opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned on an issue that we unfortunately know all too well.

Security Council resolutions on this subject not only enjoy the firm support of my Government, but also carry institutional weight, since, as established in resolution 1612 (2005) and resolution 2143 (2014), adopted today, the primary role of States in protecting and assisting girls and boys in armed conflict and developing the necessary corrective measures is recognized. Colombia agrees with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Zerrougui, that in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established under resolution 1612 (2005), any dialogue between special representatives, the United Nations team in our country or the task force of the monitoring and reporting mechanism will be possible only with the prior express agreement of the Government of Colombia, and we were thus able to work jointly.

After the visit by Mrs. Graça Machel to Colombia in 1996, almost 20 years ago, to share her report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306), we adopted a law prohibiting and punishing the recruitment of children under 18 years of age by the armed forces. Our commitment is also evidenced in the voluntary acceptance of the mechanism, the ongoing dialogue at the political and technical levels between the national Government and the United Nations system, and the establishment and implementation of comprehensive policies to protect children from recruitment.

Allow me to share with the Council that the fundamental strategy of the Colombian State includes a policy to prevent the recruitment and use of girls, boys and adolescents by illegal organized armed groups and criminal groups. Since 2010, we have been able to dedicate a significant amount — \$190 million to date — to implementing that initiative. Colombia has established an intersectoral committee that, since 2007, has been working to reduce the recruitment of youth by illegal armed groups. The committee brings together 23 national, regional and local entities that address the prevention of sexual violence against girls and boys. That strategy has produced encouraging results. We have not achieved everything we wanted to, and we are not able to declare a complete victory, but at least 3,400 children have been dissociated from illegal groups. Some 1,160 investigations have been opened since 2003 by the country's general prosecutor concerning the rights of forcibly recruited children and the childhood of which armed groups deprived them.

Colombia believes that the United Nations role in the issue of children in armed conflict deserves our attention due to the gravity and importance of the issue. The focus should be on cooperation, prevention and the development of national capacities to prevent, combat and respond to this kind of problem, which confers on us the moral obligation to provide a brighter future for any society that calls

for it.

In 2013, the National Centre for Historical Memory, which was established by the Government of Colombia as part of the peace process and through the law for victims and the restoration of land, published a heartrending report entitled “Enough already: a memoir of war and dignity”, which recounts the very valiant way in which women in particular demanded that illegal groups return their children, who had been tricked into being recruited or had simply been recruited against their will. I therefore want to emphasize, as our Ambassador indicated to the Council last year (see S/PV.6980), we believe that the implementation of the mechanism set out in resolution 1612 (2005) should also be sharply focused on strengthening the existing international pressure brought to bear on illegal armed groups to put an end to their violent actions and the recruitment of minors. Similarly, we also believe that we should always bear in mind that in dealing with this issue, the Council should consider the situations and focus on those where there are armed groups that indeed threaten international peace and security, and establish distinctions with those situations that are not on its agenda. Every case must be analysed on an individual basis and the appropriate response to the circumstances, as well the specific context, of each situation should be found.

The Government of Colombia is working with the full conviction that the rebuilding of society in post-conflict situations, if we are to achieve the peace that we so deeply desire as Colombians, should be established on the basis of protection for boys and girls. As underscored by President Santos Calderón himself, Colombia seeks genuine peace — peace that will ensure non-repetition, contribute to an environment of reconciliation and heal the wounds of confrontation, and give my country its first generation in a long time of children who grow up in an environment of peace, security and prosperity.