

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

Statement by Mr. Spinellis, Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network, namely, Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Panama, Slovenia, Switzerland and Thailand, and on behalf of the Republic of South Africa as an observer.

The Network is a cross-regional group of States that promotes human security as a people-centred, comprehensive and prevention-oriented approach for achieving peace, development and human rights. The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a core matter for the Network.

First, I should like to express my appreciation to Luxembourg for taking the initiative to convene this very important meeting and for the comprehensive and stimulating concept note (S/2014/144, annex). We welcome the holding of this debate to tackle this critical matter. We also welcome the adoption of resolution 2143 (2014), which enables us to proceed with a successful way forward.

The Human Security Network also welcomes the launching of the campaign “Children, not soldiers”, initiated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF, in collaboration with other United Nations partners, with a view to ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflict by 2016.

The Human Security Network remains concerned by the numbers of children that are negatively affected by conflict and post-conflict situations, as mentioned by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Since Graça Machel’s seminal report (A/51/150) recognized the impact of armed conflict on children, millions of children have continued to be caught amid armed conflicts, not only as mere bystanders but as targets of multiple acts of violence, such as attacks against schools, mutilations and sexual abuse, as well as hunger, disease and exploitation as tools of war. Such children are subjected to death and suffering and are consequently transfigured into victims of terror and fear. We therefore remain deeply concerned for children’s safety in all armed conflicts, including in Syria, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and many other places. Furthermore, we strongly deplore the use of schools as detention and torture centres.

This is a grave and urgent matter, and it is therefore essential to shift our focus to action plan adoption and implementation as a practical way forward. Action plans are vital strategic tools in order to end these horrendous violations against children in situations of conflict. It is therefore important for concerned Member States to pursue concrete, time-bound action plans and to commit to action plan implementation through national-level strategies. We acknowledge that respect should also be given to the time frame of the action plans, and non-compliance should result in direct consequences for those concerned.

The importance of strengthening national accountability mechanisms is also essential. It is vital to ensure an adequate child-protection mandate and to place importance on the monitoring and reporting of violations. We highlight the monitoring and reporting of violations, which should be upheld and considered as noteworthy tools, to mitigate the ongoing effects of impunity. That should be accompanied by political dialogue, demarches, multilateral cooperation and mainstreaming the issue of

children in armed conflict in order to advocate for the protection of children.

The Security Council is encouraged to exert pressure on perpetrators and to apply the necessary measures to address these violations. That includes imposing lawful consequences for perpetrators. Stronger collective commitment to the responsibility for dealing effectively with persistent perpetrators of violations against children in armed conflict is encouraged of all States.

It is the responsibility of all States to investigate and prosecute those responsible for violations against children. It is therefore important to develop legislation criminalizing violations against children and to develop the necessary prosecutorial and investigative capacities. In that regard, we reiterate the importance of ensuring universal registration, including late birth registration, in order to investigate and verify the age of recruits and ensure protection of those under 18 years of age from active military service. Furthermore, Member States are encouraged to take the necessary steps to end violations such as the military use of schools and to hold perpetrators accountable for violations that have already been committed.

The Human Security Network highlights the importance of focusing on the prevention of future violations, and of restoring and integrating those who have been affected by conflict through protection and relief. The Arms Trade Treaty is a step forward towards the protection of children in armed conflict, as its provisions establish that exporting States shall take into account the risk of covered conventional arms or items being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of violence against children.

The implementation of concrete primary prevention strategies is imperative. That should include sustainable ways to ensure an age-verification process in recruitment procedures, measures to ensure that children have birth certificates, and education programmes to inform communities on national and international laws pertaining to recruitment and the consequent reporting of unlawful recruitment practices.

We underscore the importance of peacekeeping missions and the provision of key psychosocial services to children and their families affected by armed conflict. We must also aim to support national institutions and mechanisms that protect civilians in armed conflict.

The Human Security Network urges Member States to keep concerns relating to children high on the international agenda and remains committed to, and diligent in, the implementation of resolutions relevant to the topic, including resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1998 (2011), as well as resolution 2143 (2014), adopted by the Security Council today, which contains important provisions to ensure and protect the right of the child to education. The members of the Human Security Network are dedicated and committed to responding to the issues that have been raised.

I should now like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

Greece welcomes the holding of this debate to tackle this critical matter. We also welcome the adoption of resolution 2143 (2014), which enables us to keep up the momentum to proceed to a successful way forward.

Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union.

It has already been established that the impact of armed conflict on children is a grave and urgent matter.

It is therefore essential to shift our focus to the implementation of Security Council resolutions adopted to date as a practical way forward.

Greece welcomes the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2014/144) and we too express our concern pertaining to the escalating numbers of children that are negatively affected by conflict and post-conflict situations. This is in addition to the military use of, and attacks on, schools as a tool of war. Schools, which formerly represented a place of safety, are now being transformed into places of trepidation and terror. Lamentably, the culture of violence is replacing the culture of learning, thereby reinforcing ideologies of an unsafe world.

In Syria, for example, approximately 1,000 schools were used as detention and torture centres in 2013. It is vital for Member States to protect children and teachers from attacks and to protect children's rights to education by taking steps to end the military use of schools and to hold perpetrators accountable. A strong commitment to the responsibility for dealing effectively with persistent perpetrators of violations against children in armed conflict is encouraged of all States in order to combat impunity. The importance of national protection and accountability mechanisms is therefore essential. Engagement with non-State armed groups for the purposes of ending violations and concluding action plans is also necessary.

It is important for Member States to pursue concrete, time-bound action plans and to commit to action plan implementation through national-level strategies. It is therefore crucial to call upon donors to support national efforts to strengthen capacities for child protection. That includes training and capacity-building for child protection workers and advisers, peacebuilders and peacekeepers, and working together with communities on preventive efforts.

We must also aim to support national institutions and mechanisms that protect civilians in armed conflict. Furthermore, the monitoring and reporting of violations should be upheld and considered as noteworthy tools to mitigate the ongoing effects of impunity. That should be accompanied by political dialogue, demarches, multilateral cooperation and mainstreaming the topics of children in armed conflict so as to advocate for the protection of children.

In the words of a former child soldier in Sierra Leone, Ishmael Beah, "children have the resilience to outlive their sufferings, if given a chance". Let us work together to give those children a chance for hope and a future.