

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

Statement by Ms. Al-Thani, Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations

Allow me to congratulate you, Madam, on your accession to the presidency of the Council and to thank you for convening this important meeting to promote the implementation of the Council's agenda in ensuring the protection of children affected by armed conflict. I am also pleased to welcome His Excellency Mr. Jean Asselborn, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg, and thank him for his participation this morning. I would be remiss not to thank the Secretary-General; Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict; Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF; and Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh for their valuable statements this morning.

We continue to face many challenges, including grave violations against children. Since children are the most vulnerable group in societies, and given the continued suffering inflicted upon them in complex and diverse armed conflicts and the non-compliance of parties to conflicts with international humanitarian law, we look to the Security Council to further consider this issue and take more effective measures to protect children from violations. In this regard, we commend the concept paper on the subject submitted by the President today (S/2014/144, annex). While we reaffirm our commitment to the frameworks adopted by the United Nations in this respect, we believe that attention should not be limited to the conceptual level. Rather, the recommendations of the Secretary-General and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must be applied to the individual cases considered by the Council.

The international community is determined to protect children in times of war and peace alike. The need for the international community to give priority to this issue is underscored by more than 25 articles of the Geneva Conventions and its two additional protocols that refer to children specifically, as well as the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child as universally ratified.

Palestinian children are suffering from injustice because of ongoing Israeli violations against the Palestinian people. As indicated by the Secretary-General in his latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2013/245), in one year alone 50 Palestinian children were killed and more than 665 injured by Israeli forces. Palestinian children, including minors, are subject to arbitrary arrest by the Israeli authorities on the pretext of being a security threat. According to the Secretary-General, more than 194 children were arrested by Israeli authorities. It is also alarming that a large number of attacks were made on schools and educational institutions in the Palestinian occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, where attacks on 321 schools were reported, representing a large proportion of schools in the Palestinian occupied territories.

The Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2014/31) describes horrendous situations, including grave violations against children in particular. The Syrian regime is primarily responsible for the tragic outcomes of its policies of oppression and use of force against the the Syrian people who rose up peacefully to demand their legitimate rights. The use of excessive and arbitrary military force by the regime's forces and militia have killed and maimed countless numbers of children, with long-term direct and indirect impacts, such as psychological effects.

The regime's security and military forces do not spare children from arrest, arbitrary detention, ill treatment and fatal torture. The violations perpetrated by the regime include the use of children as human shields, sexual and physical violence, and massacres of civilians, including babies. Children, who are

especially vulnerable to hunger and disease, are obviously the main victims of the regime's policy of starving Syrian towns and villages. They are also largely affected by the massive destruction inflicted upon the health-care sector in Syria. It is alarming, that as a result of the crisis, polio has re-emerged in Syria.

In addition to all this, it is painful to consider that an entire generation of Syrian children may be lost because the lack of access to education, as indicated in a recent UNICEF report. More than 3,000 schools have been destroyed and more than 1,000 used as shelters. We are very concerned about the recurring attacks on schools and their use as military barracks, operations bases and detention centres. This is not only a violation of the civilian nature of such institutions, but it also endangers children and deprives them of their fundamental right to education, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report as well as in those of other organizations, such as the latest report on attacks on education issued by the Global Alliance to Protect Education from Attacks. In that connection, we commend the efforts of the Global Alliance to formulate guidelines aimed at protecting schools and universities from military use.

In conclusion, we are here today to re-emphasize the importance of efforts to prevent the recruitment of children and promote their rehabilitation. We would like to reaffirm that it is equally important to involve United Nations peacekeeping operations with a mandate for the protection of children in armed conflicts and advisers thereof. We reiterate the importance of paying sufficient attention to strengthening accountability for violations against children, combating impunity for perpetrators, hold them accountable rapidly and effectively, and taking targeted measures against persistent violators.