

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

*Statement by Ms. Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict*

Let me start by thanking the delegation of Luxembourg for hosting this open debate during its presidency and for its invaluable work as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

This open debate comes at a crucial time when there is an upsurge in conflict in many places around the world. Roughly two months have passed in the year 2014. Taking stock of what this year has brought for children so far yields a dire conclusion.

In South Sudan, a new nation's horizon darkened in December 2013. Even today we have not yet grasped the extent of the grave violations against children committed in the renewed violence. Not only have tens of thousands of children been displaced, deprived of education and separated from their families and social networks, they have also recruited, used in horrific fighting, maimed or killed or forced to kill and maim. Initial reports I have received on raids on hospitals, including summary executions of the sick and old, leave me without words. When we think of South Sudan, we have to bear in mind that more than half of the population are children. A whole generation that should be entrusted with building a new nation is about to be deprived of a fair chance to do so.

As the Security Council was briefed in-depth yesterday (see S/PV.7128), the situation in the Central African Republic remains tragic. Its impact on children continues to be devastating. Resources are too limited to address the challenge of providing assistance and protection to thousands of children, including those recruited and used by parties to the conflict. I hope that the Security Council will address this situation with a robust response providing the actors on the ground with the necessary means and capacity.

In Syria, despite all the efforts of various actors, armed violation has intensified. The killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals continue unabated. Children are recruited and used by various armed groups, and are often lured into battle, where they are among the first to die. Reports of organized sexual violence as a tactic of humiliation persist. While humanitarian access in limited areas is a glimmer of hope in the darkest of times, the hardships of children have barely improved. We cannot afford a lost generation in Syria.

These first two months of 2014 have revealed once again that we must not rely on hope when children suffering in armed conflict are calling upon us to be heard. Only action and concrete measures will ultimately make a difference; only action and concrete measures will allow us to look back at 2014 and conclude that we, together, had made a difference for children this year.

Since the creation of my mandate by the General Assembly, we have seen such concrete action. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has adopted a number of conclusions over the past year, urging parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations and calling for country-specific

action. The Working Group has also visited Myanmar to assess the situation and advocate for the plight of children. The Security Council has continued to mainstream the children and armed conflict issue into both thematic and country-specific agendas, addressing new trends when and where they arise with new and innovative measures. I hope that the Council will do so again if the draft resolution before it is adopted.

I dearly welcome the endorsement of the “Children, not soldiers” campaign. It was before the Council that I first expressed my intent to work towards child-free Government armed forces by the end of 2016. It is my firm belief that this goal is an achievable one. Eight national Government forces remain on the Secretary- General’s list for this violation. Yesterday, I had the honour to welcome representatives from each of these Governments at the launch event for the “Children, not soldiers” campaign. The commitment shown by the Member States concerned is a powerful message to the international community and parties to conflict — State and non-State actors alike — all over the world. It is time to make child soldiers history. I want to stress here that the “Children, not soldiers” campaign is not only a joint effort of my Office and UNICEF; it must be a joint effort of all of us who have gathered here today.

We have already begun to establish road maps to expedite the implementation of action plans with parties listed. Road maps are set up jointly with the concerned Government to tackle priority issues and are based on a joint assessment of achievements made and existing gaps in the implementation of agreed action plans. In Chad, the road map was agreed last year and is the basis for action taken. In Afghanistan, the road map has already been drafted jointly with Government representatives. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, too, we are close to the establishment of such a document. The sustained implementation of commitments agreed upon by the signatories to the action plan will ultimately lead to the better protection of children and the delisting of the concerned party from the annexes of the Secretary- General’s annual report.

In the course of the campaign, we have been able to benefit from the expertise of a variety of Governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and child protection experts, giving us a better understanding of challenges and solutions alike. This enables us to even better protect children in unique cultural, economic, political and social contexts.

New partnerships and the strengthening of existing ones also lie at the heart of the implementation of resolution 1998 (2011). By taking the lead with UNICEF in drafting a guidance on how to monitor and report attacks on schools and hospitals, threats and attacks against education and health-care-related personnel, and the military use of schools, we have reached out to specialized United Nations agencies and NGOs that in turn will adopt the children and armed conflict agenda in their own programmes and projects. New stakeholders are thereby won for our cause, and we learn to understand how our cause can strengthen theirs. The guidance on the implementation of resolution 1998 (2011), which we intend to launch in the coming weeks, will mark another important step forward.

I am heartened by the fact that the Security Council has strengthened the language on the military use of schools in today’s draft resolution. As members know, military use puts schools and school children in

danger. We would like to see schools not become potential battlefields. Seeking ways to better prevent attacks on schools calls for efforts to incrementally prevent their military use by parties to conflict.

My Office and all other child protection actors at the United Nations Headquarters level — including UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs — will continue to stand ready and support the task forces with all means possible. However, it is impossible to monitor and report on violations against children in conflict and to address such violations appropriately without the necessary capacity on the ground. Almost weekly, task force members approach my Office and plead for the continued support in advocacy for enhanced capacity in child protection. We must be able to respond to their pleas with adequate resources and innovative models drawing from past experiences.

It is also important to mainstream child protection into peacekeeping and special political missions through the predeployment training of troops. I cannot stress enough in this regard the importance of knowing that the Security Council stands behind this. We owe it to the children affected by armed conflict and to the dedicated men and women putting their own lives at risk to ensure that the voices of these children reach our ears.

I began my statement with a grim picture in three situations of conflict. But children face similar atrocities in many other conflicts. We must not leave them in despair. Today we know that measures can be taken successfully to end and prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict. Dialogue with non-State actors, engagement with Governments, capacity-building on all levels and the mainstreaming of our agenda into all aspects of peace and security continue. Those activities would be unthinkable without the framework developed by the Security Council in the past years. Hundreds of thousands of children have their eyes upon the Council as it continues to lead the way in protecting children from armed conflict.