

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict
18 June 2015, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mejía Vélez, Representative of Colombia to the United Nations

(Spoke in Spanish): I would like to thank you, Madam President, and your country for holding this important debate. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the representative of UNICEF, and Ms. Eunice Apio for her testimony.

In March, we met here in the Council to discuss the serious human-rights violations affecting children (see S/PV.7414), and the enormous concern over the worsening situation in many parts of the world was palpable. Today, four months later, despite the efforts and involvement of the international community, we see in the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) that the situation in that regard is referred to as unprecedented. That shows us how great the present challenge is. In this difficult global context, Colombia, which is not on the Security Council's list, is, however, mentioned in the report, as a result of the prolonged internal conflict, lasting over five decades, which has affected our development and our civilian population, particularly the most vulnerable segment of it — our children.

Three years ago, President Juan Manuel Santos and the entire nation courageously sought a negotiated end to the conflict, the sole one in the Americas. That enabled the Government to implement pioneering legislation at the international level, reflected in the Law on Victims and Land Restitution and the joint agreement on clearing anti-personnel mines. Moreover, we have made progress on three out of the five items on the agenda of the peace talks, and have subsequently improved the living conditions of the civilian population. As the Special Representative mentioned, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia announced that they would remove children younger than 15 years of age from their ranks. That is why my country is deeply perplexed by our country's portrayal in the Secretary-General's report. It does not reflect the present situation, nor the progress achieved. The terms used to describe the situation in Colombia in 2014 cannot be the same as those that would have applied in 1999. Challenged by enormous difficulties, we have taken brave steps in the peace negotiations, because we see that as the best way to restore the rights of all persons affected by the armed conflict — especially our children.

Less than a year ago, in August 2014, I was here at the United Nations for the official presentation of the Secretary General's Guidance Note on reparations for conflict-related sexual violence (see S/2014/181), in which Colombia was held up as a paradigm for the efforts that it has implemented. In the Note, the implementation of our historic law regarding victims was recognized as an effort without precedent in the context of armed conflicts elsewhere in the world. Those developments complement the public policies implemented by the Colombian Government. I would like to mention just two examples.

First, Colombia had a great number of displaced persons, but the country has made every effort to deal with the problem and its impact on our children. Furthermore, I would point out that during the period under review in the report, our country reported a noteworthy reduction of 47 per cent in the phenomenon of internally displaced persons. That reduction has not been referred to in the report.

Secondly, in 2014, the Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of Recruitment, which involves 27 State agencies, implemented urgent prevention and protection measures, given the risk of the recruitment of girls and boys in more than 200 municipalities in Colombia. In September 2014, I addressed the Council on that very issue. I said, "[m]y task ... is to build up a harmonious and stable relationship of mutual respect with the [United Nations] system through which it can be possible to improve conditions on the ground, so that Colombia ... is never again included in the Secretary-General's report on this issue." (S/PV.7259, pp. 31-32) Colombia and my delegation have done everything possible to achieve that goal. We have opened all channels of communication: we have promoted meetings with all relevant authorities; we have approached the Office of the Special Representative with openness; and, in that spirit, we would respectfully ask the Special Representative to take full account of the substantive considerations of the Colombian State reflected in the current report, which we hope to see corrected in the final draft. We have made significant progress in protecting our children and ensuring their rights. We will continue working with full determination and conviction to that end.

Dialogue and cooperation are undoubtedly the best tools available to the United Nations for working with States. I therefore reiterate that the Colombian State is completely prepared to continue to make progress in this area within a respectful relationship based on accuracy and objectivity. I would also reiterate to you, Mr. President, our determination to work for the good