

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

Statement by Francois Delattre, Representative of France to the United Nations

(Spoke in French): I thank the Malaysian presidency and you, Mr. Minister, for organizing this crucial debate, which comes at a particularly busy time, both politically and emotionally, in terms of the United Nations agenda. The challenges identified by the Secretary-General in terms of the protection of children in armed conflict, the abduction of children by extremist groups and the recent allegations of sexual abuse all call on us to solemnly reaffirm today our commitment to the protection of children.

I also wish to thank and commend the relentless commitment of UNICEF, represented here by Ms. Yoka Brandt, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, whose mandate is essential to improving the situation of children in armed conflict. We must all support her work and even strengthen it. Finally, I would like to convey my gratitude to Ms. Eunice Apio, from the Facilitation for Peace and Development non-governmental organization, for her enlightening and moving testimony on the abductions carried out by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda. That testimony, which is only a reflection of a tiny part of the reality endured by the nearly 24,500 children abducted since 2002, shows the added value of this debate and especially the importance of resolution 2225 (2015), which we have just adopted. It was high time to update the United Nations child-protection mechanisms so as to turn abductions into a criterion for inclusion in the Secretary-General's black list. I wish to congratulate Malaysia for its outstanding work on this issue.

The comprehensive United Nations mechanism for the protection of children deserves our attention today. Established in 2005 under the leadership of France, that mechanism now consists of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the annual report of the Secretary-General, with its black list, the mandate of his Special Representative and, especially, a reporting and monitoring mechanism. It is essential that the mechanism, which identifies violations committed by the parties on the ground and provides information for the Secretary-General's reports and decisions, remain impartial and confidential. It is important that the United Nations continue to ensure the methodological effectiveness of the mechanism, which cannot, of course, account for all the violations committed in countries in conflict, but remains the most effective tool to date for informing us about the six grave violations of children's rights. We must therefore defend the mechanism and, if necessary, reinforce and improve it.

Indeed, the mechanism today covers violations committed by both Government forces and non-State armed groups in what are still too many situations. Most child recruitment and almost 96 per cent of abductions are committed by non-State armed groups, which are often difficult to access by the United Nations and monitoring teams. States must therefore facilitate the access of the United Nations in their territory in order to engage non-State armed groups on children's rights. That was the purpose of the open debate (see S/PV.7414) organized under the French presidency on 25 March. It was also one of the main thrusts of the non-paper that we developed on the basis of the operational proposals of Member States. It is also the thrust of the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which we call on all States to sign.

Among the non-State armed groups, violent extremist and terrorist groups pose a special challenge for the United Nations and the international community. Unmoved by the black list and indifferent to sanctions, groups such as Daesh in Iraq and Syria and Boko Haram in West Africa continue to carry out mass crimes with complete impunity. In that context, the fight against terrorism is a necessary, albeit insufficient, response. **14/96 15-18380 S/PV.7466 Children and armed conflict 18/06/2015** There is another even more powerful weapon to fight violent extremism, namely, education. It is in schools and within families that the fight against radicalization must be taught so as to prevent children from joining voluntarily, or by force, non-State armed groups. That is why France firmly condemns attacks against schools.

France was especially committed to the inclusion of such criteria as part of the path to blacklisting, back in 2011. Pursuant to resolutions 1998 (2011) and resolution 2143 (2014), France remains convinced that the military occupation of schools should be avoided. France has taken note of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, but regrets that they do not fully reflect existing international humanitarian law, which still represents the best protection for civilians and children during conflict. The scale of the violations of international humanitarian law today demonstrates that it is that body of law that must be implemented and respected by States in all circumstances.

I would like to end my statement with a case that has struck at France's very heart and affected the people of Central Africa and the United Nations as a whole, namely, the allegations of sexual violence committed against minors by

foreign troops, including French soldiers. France of course takes very seriously those serious accusations. The French authorities have reacted firmly and, as soon as they were informed of the allegations, in late July 2014, immediately sought justice. A judicial inquiry is under way. The French authorities are determined to shed full light on the case, in cooperation with the United Nations and the Central African Republic. As the President of the Republic, Mr. François Hollande, most vigorously underscored, if the allegations are proved, his determination will be unforgiving, with exemplary disciplinary action imposed on those responsible, in addition to the criminal response, which is under the authority of the courts. In that context, we hope that the Secretary-General's decision to set up an independent external review of the process by which the United Nations deals with the allegations of sexual violence by foreign troops in the Central African Republic will strengthen the early-warning and response systems of the United Nations in that regard. Finally, in the name of truth and the fight against impunity, my country fully backs the policy of due diligence with respect to foreign troops and the zero-tolerance policy in cases of sexual abuse involving the United Nations. I reiterate that France considers the implementation of those policies a top political priority. More than ever before, we owe that not only to the victims, but to all of those that are fighting every day on behalf of the protection of children.