

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

Statement made by Vakhtang Makharoblishvili, Representative of Georgia to the United Nations

At the outset, allow me to thank the Malaysian presidency for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, and to further thank Dato Sri Anifah Aman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, for presiding over today's meeting.

Let me also thank Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Eunice Apio, Director of the Facilitation for Peace and Development organization, for their comprehensive briefings and thoughtful analyses.

We applaud the efforts of the Malaysian presidency on behalf of resolution 2225 (2015) adopted today, of which Georgia was a sponsor.

My country fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

The Secretary-General states in his latest annual report on the item before us: "There were unprecedented challenges in 2014 with regard to the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in situations affected by conflict". (S/2015/409, para.5) To our dismay, that is today's reality. UNICEF called 2014 "a devastating year for children, with as many as 15 million caught in conflicts in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Ukraine".

We believe that the Council should address this important issue more actively and resolutely, because we face an ever-increasing trend of violence against children in both conflict and non-conflict situations, including violence committed by non-State actors.

Despite broad understanding of the nature of the problem and despite the numerous efforts at the regional and international levels to address them, we have yet to see tangible progress on the ground. Children continue to be abducted in armed-conflict situations, recruited as combatants, and boys and girls continue to fall victim to acts of violence, murder, maiming and arbitrary detention committed by parties to conflict across the globe. Boko Haram's abduction of hundreds of women and girls in Chibok and the kidnappings in Syria and Iraq committed by Daesh are glaring examples of the types of gross violations to which children are subjected in armed conflicts. The areas controlled by non-State actors and terrorist groups, as well as territories under foreign occupation, are zones of grave risk for children, with imminent threats to their lives by actors who operate in total disregard for internationally recognized legal norms.

Let me use this opportunity to reiterate that the issue of child protection is of great importance for Georgia. Our Government spares no effort to ensure adequate living conditions for children affected by internal displacement. Such measures include expanding social and education assistance programmes and implementing a comprehensive national strategy. Unfortunately, my Government has been deprived of the opportunity to address the humanitarian needs of children affected by conflict who live in regions that remain under illegal Russian military occupation. We are extremely concerned that fundamental human rights continue to be violated on a daily basis. That becomes especially disturbing considering the absence of international monitoring mechanisms inside the occupied regions of Georgia. Children residing in the Tskhinvali and Abkhazia regions are deprived of minimal safeguards for the protection of their rights, as envisioned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Georgian children living under foreign occupation are being prevented from exercising their fundamental right to education in their mother tongue, which is guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Freedom of movement is also severely restricted for Georgian children living under occupation. The intensive process of the installation of barbed-wire fences and embankments along the occupation line in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions significantly affects the livelihoods of the local population, including those of children. Russian military forces do not allow schoolchildren to cross the occupation line to attend classes on the territory controlled by the Georgian Government. On a number of tragic occasions, even people seeking medical care have died en route to the hospital after being denied passage across the dividing line. We fear that the so-called integration treaties recently signed

by the Russian Federation with the aforementioned Georgian regions will cause further deterioration in the living conditions of the families residing inside the occupied territories.

We once again call on the Russian Federation to respect the fundamental principles of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and other legal instruments within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as the provisions of the August 2008 ceasefire agreement between Georgia and Russia.

We have a common responsibility to strengthen our efforts to protect children in armed conflict. We need to take concrete and tangible steps to alleviate the consequences of armed hostilities for new generations and safeguard their rights and freedoms. For its part, Georgia stands ready to contribute to concerted international efforts and to help ensure more effective protection of the population caught up in armed conflict or in post-conflict situations.