

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

Statement by Van Bohemen, Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations

Foreign Minister Aman, we are honoured to have you presiding over the Council and guiding us today.

New Zealand welcomes Malaysia's initiative in bringing this item before the Council. It builds usefully on the open debate held under France's presidency in March (see S/PV.7414), when we provided an overview of our approach to this subject.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) shows that 2014 was a particularly devastating year for children in countries affected by armed conflict. Thousands of children died unnecessarily. The report highlights several trends relevant to this enormous loss. Even with the good work of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, major problems persist, especially with rehabilitation and reintegration, particularly among girls following sexual violence and among children with disabilities, thereby exacerbating the impact of conflict.

We have to face the reality that for many, including members of this Organization, targeting schools and hospitals is considered acceptable despite the fact that such action is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. New Zealand urges all countries to put in place safeguards such as those outlined in the Safe Schools Declaration adopted in Oslo last month to protect schools and hospitals from military use in armed conflict. We owe it to our children and their futures to do all we can to protect them.

In 2014 increasing numbers of children were abducted, in particular by extremist groups, and used as tools designed to punish communities in the cruelest of ways. From the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, in Iraq and in Syria, to Boko Haram in Nigeria, children have been taken into captivity, tortured and abused, indoctrinated or sold into sexual slavery.

Resolution 2225 (2015), adopted today and which New Zealand was pleased to co-sponsor, is an 15-18380 **17/96 18/06/2015** Children and armed conflict **S/PV.7466** important response to this trend. Adding abductions as a trigger violation for listing in the Secretary-General's report demonstrates our commitment to calling out the perpetrators of such crimes before the international community. This can have an important deterrent effect on those who may be considering such actions and those who command them. It will also help to ensure that the right information is being documented in order to support long-term accountability. We congratulate Malaysia for its leadership in this important step forward.

New Zealand has noted with considerable concern the observations section of this year's annual report. In this, the Secretary-General deplores the fact that the way in which the case was made by some parties about the targeting of children in conflict has threatened the integrity of the Council's listing mechanism. We share the Secretary-General's concern at efforts to interfere in the independent discharge of the Secretary-General's office and the implicit presumption that some forces are exempt from criticism, whatever the objective evidence may suggest. The Secretary-General has a clear mandate to report on what he considers to be grave violations committed against children in armed conflict. When he does, he is acting at the behest of the Council — and, indeed, of the wider membership of the Organization. We all have a responsibility to protect