

**Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict**  
**18<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement made by Lourdes Ortiz Yparraguire, Representative of Philippines to the United Nations*

The Philippines congratulates Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Council this month and appreciates its initiative in organizing today's debate on children and armed conflict.

The Philippines aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

As a manifestation of the steadfast commitment of the Philippines to the protection of children, especially in situations of armed conflict, our Government continues to take steps in that area with the cooperation and support of various agencies in Government, civil society and our partners in the United Nations system. Last year, after 40 years of bloody conflict and 16 years of a difficult peace process, the Government concluded peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and signed a comprehensive agreement on the Bangsamoro. Draft legislation designed to become the legal framework and governing law for the new Bangsamoro entity is now under consideration in the Philippine Congress. Last Tuesday we implemented the first phase of the decommissioning of MILF combatants and their firearms. With those confidence-building developments, we now have lasting peace in the southern Philippines within our grasp, so that our children may wake each day and end each day in a safe and peaceful environment whether they are at home, at play or at school.

Council members will recall that in 2009 the MILF signed a United Nations action plan aimed at addressing the issue of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces' recruitment and use of child soldiers. That agreement was renewed in 2013, and UNICEF's child-protection specialist based in the southern Philippines remains confident that the MILF will continue to cooperate in order to secure its removal from the list of groups that exploit children in armed conflict. UNICEF has also completed its orientation and training on child rights across 31 MILF base commands and seven front commands in Mindanao for Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces commanders and troops. We hope that the second phase of the action plan, which seeks to implement a communication campaign, will get under way soon. Other activities under the action plan, such as ensuring the United Nations unhindered access for verification purposes and separating former MILF combatants found to be under 18 years of age, will also continue.

In his report (S/2015/409), the Secretary-General notes a decline in cases of child-soldier recruitment in the Philippines, from 20 in 2013 to seven in 2014. The Philippine Government is continuing to work hard to bring that number down to zero. On behalf of the armed forces of the Philippines, it has submitted a strategic plan on preventing and responding to grave children's rights violations in situations of armed conflict, as well as a draft circular on child protection during armed conflict situations. It has also issued guidelines for the conduct of activities by the armed forces of the Philippines inside or within the premises of schools and hospitals.

In that context, the Department of Education of the Philippines has implemented its guidelines on the protection of children during armed conflict by requiring school heads, as well as teaching and non-teaching personnel, to report within 24 hours any information about or incident of grave child-rights violations to the Council for the Welfare of Children, providing information on the date, time and location of the incident, the name, number, gender and age of the children affected and the armed groups involved. We have also established an inter-agency committee on children in armed conflict, which serves as a monitoring, reporting and response system on grave child-rights violations in situations of armed conflict. The team works with the United Nations Development Programme as part of the technical working group of the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting grave child-rights violations in armed conflicts.

The Philippines remains committed to keeping our children safe and will continue to engage and cooperate with all stakeholders in the prevention of grave childrights violations, as well as in monitoring, reporting and responding to such violations committed in the context of armed conflict.