

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

Statement made by František Růžička, Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations

At the outset, let me thank Malaysia for organizing today's open debate and express my appreciation for the work and dedication of today's briefers, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Ms. Yoka Brandt and Ms. Eunice Apio, not only for their presentations but also for the work they are doing on behalf of children in the most challenging situations imaginable. Slovakia wishes to align itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the European Union. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015), which we proudly co-sponsored; it is designed to strengthen efforts to address the abduction of children and to reaffirm measures for the protection of children in armed conflict.

Not long ago, in March, we gathered here in the Security Council Chamber to seek to put an end to what has unfortunately become a daily reality for millions of children in conflict-affected areas (see S/PV.7410). Less than three months later, we are back here discussing the issue again. One could, of course, ask whether twice in three months is not too often. Unfortunately, it is not. As stated in the Secretary-General's recently published report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409),

“There were unprecedented challenges in 2014 with regard to the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in situations affected by conflict ... Mass abductions of civilians, including children, have become an increasingly prevalent feature of conflict in many situations ... The abduction of children had primarily been a precursor to other violations, such as killing and maiming, recruitment and use, or sexual violence”.

That is the unfortunate reality, 10 years after the Security Council adopted its resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict, and now the topic has become a regular item on the Council agenda.

Allow me to point out another area of concern: terrorism and violent extremism. That threat to children has at least three dimensions. First, children have become deliberate targets, often subjected to extreme violence ranging from sexual abuse and forced marriage to kidnappings and brutal killings. Secondly, they have become weapons, made to fight alongside armed groups and at times used as human bombs. Twenty-seven suicide attacks were reported in the first five months of this year, and it is an even more tragic fact that women and children carried out three quarters of those attacks. Thirdly, many children have become trapped in the web of terrorist narratives. It is the younger generation that most actively uses the Internet and social networks. At the same time, it is the Internet and social media that serve to spread such narratives and lure young people into the ranks of terrorists and violent extremists.

Our response must be strong, targeted and comprehensive. We must continuously focus on children and teenagers. We must approach them at a very early stage in a manner with which they are familiar and using language they understand — and they most certainly do not understand the language of bureaucracy, especially not that of international bureaucracy. We must give them genuine prospects for their future and banish the false dreams of terrorist propaganda, which very often turn into nightmares.

I would like to point out four areas on which to concentrate in order to improve the situation of children in armed conflict. The first is peacekeeping and child protection. Let me highlight the critical importance of providing military, police and civilian peacekeepers with adequate pre-deployment and in-mission training on mission-specific child-protection issues. Priority should be given to combating all types and forms of sexual violence committed against children. The inclusion of child protection in the training of peacekeepers, the mandates of crisis-management operations, standard operating procedures and rules of engagement should be mandatory for all uniformed and civilian peacekeeping personnel.

The second area is the restoration of justice and security. That is a key aspect of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. Countries in post-conflict development must, with the help of the international community, take concrete steps to address the restoration of justice and security, and demonstrate their commitment to the rule of law and to the vital democratic principle of civilian control of the armed and security forces. Among many other factors, properly tailored security-sector reforms affect the safety and security of children and youth. In its resolution 2143 (2014) on children and armed conflict, the Security Council expressed the clear conviction that “the protection of children in armed conflict should be an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and build peace”.

The third area is the establishment of child protection units in national security forces. We must go far beyond a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse in such forces. Units should be trained how to address child and youth issues in the traumatic post-conflict period.

The fourth area is education and communication. In order to raise young people who are resistant to extremist ideologies, we should handle our communication strategies better and implement “educate-to-tolerate” curricula so as to form a generation that will view social diversity as a natural environment to live in.