

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

*Statement by Ignacio Ybanez, Representative of Spain to the United Nations*

*(Spoke in Spanish):* Allow me to commend you, Sir, for organizing this open debate and for the adoption of an important new resolution on children and armed conflict (resolution 2225 (2015)), of which Spain was a sponsor. The resolution is the tangible result of Malaysia's excellent work as head of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which we applaud. I would also like to express our gratitude for the briefings by the Secretary-General and by Ms. Lelia 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 Ugandan non-governmental organization Facilitation for Peace and Development.

I am joined today by a delegation of Spanish parliamentarians led by the President of the Senate. Their presence underscores the interest and importance that Spain accords the work of the Security Council in promoting peace, security and the rights of children, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Spain considers it a national priority to contribute to a world that will be more just, safer and more prosperous as a legacy for today's youth and future generations. In that spirit, we accept the responsibility conferred on us by the mandate of the Council and with that attitude we actively participate in negotiating texts and in debates such as the one that brings us together here today at the initiative of the Council presidency.

The issue of children and armed conflict has continued to expand since it was first placed on the Council's agenda, 10 years ago, at the initiative of France. The emergence of new conflicts and global threats made 2014 an especially tragic year — the most horrifying — for millions of girls and boys. Despite some progress, reports such as the one before us today (S/2015/409) highlight the need for the Council to continue its firm pursuit of that agenda. Along with the numerous and execrable acts of violence committed against girls and boys in armed conflict — beginning with the recruitment of child soldiers — the abduction of minors has become a routine occurrence in many conflict zones. Mass abductions are a new tactic employed in particular by non-State armed groups to terrorize civilian populations. Abduction is only the beginning of a far greater horror that generally ends in forced recruitment, sexual abuse, child trafficking, slavery, mutilation and murder. In that context, girls are especially vulnerable to being abducted for sexual purposes. Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Lord's Resistance Army in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/Daesh embody those cruel and evil practices aimed at overwhelming all possible resistance through the use of terror.

The primary goal of the resolution just adopted is, in fact, to incorporate the abduction of children as grounds for inclusion on the Secretary-General's list of grave crimes against children in armed conflict by countries or armed groups that fail to comply with the measures of prevention and protection it provides. We welcome this substantive and far-reaching advance.

With the aim of furthering that agenda, I would like now to focus on five key areas: respect for international humanitarian law; the role of peacekeeping operations; peace agreements and the reintegration of children into civilian life; accountability; and the mobilization of public opinion.

We will not cease to insist on the absolute importance of respect for the most basic tenets of international humanitarian law. Schools and hospitals must be respected and safeguarded. On 29 May, in Oslo, Spain signed the Safe Schools Declaration along with 37 other countries. We trust that, with the support of a growing number of Member States, progress will be made in protecting schools from military use. Unfortunately, well into the twenty-first century, it **12/96** 15-18380 **S/PV.7466** Children and armed conflict **18/06/2015** is still necessary to point out that the use of certain explosive devices, such as anti-personnel mines or cluster bombs is utterly reprehensible, as they affect the whole civilian population, inflict inhuman damage and martyr a high number of children. In that regard, I want to speak out on behalf of Spain against the use of barrel bombs in Syria, which constitutes a flagrant war crime that must not go unpunished.

The latest report of the Secretary-General refers extensively to the shelling in densely populated areas. Those actions are difficult to justify in the light of international law and result in a number of child victims so high that they can only lead to outrage. The rocket attack in Aleppo on Monday, which resulted in dozens of deaths, including many children, is another example of indiscriminate attacks, which we strongly regret and condemn. War is an ideal breeding ground for the commission of mass crimes; hence the need to put an end to the hostilities and aggression in order to be able to work on the difficult task of building and consolidating peace.

I would also like to address the role of peacekeeping operations. They contribute significantly to international peace and security by helping countries in post-conflict situations to create the conditions that make sustainable peace possible, one in which the protection of children is a key element. Therefore, I would like to reiterate the opinion expressed by Spain in March (see S/PV.7414) on the importance of strengthening the mandates of peacekeeping missions with regard to child protection. We also believe that the countries listed by the Secretary-General that have not adopted an action plan to put an end to possible violations and abuses against children committed by members of their contingents should not contribute troops to those types of operations.

It is crucial to ensure the presence of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions and to ensure adequate training for contingents on child-protection issues. All that is essential in order to be able to contribute to moving forward, in an increasingly decisive and effective way, on protecting children on the ground, which is a basic responsibility of States. Spain recalls the importance of continuing to fully apply the zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General on sexual violence and abuse and the need to ensure accountability for those involved in such acts. I would also stress the importance of prominently incorporating the needs of children into peace agreements. Spain would like to see mechanisms that address those needs in the same way that we have encouraged the participation of women in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.

In that respect, peace agreements cannot omit three important factors: the protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of armed conflicts. Affected States should ensure the existence of mechanisms that satisfactorily address those three issues. A good reintegration mechanism is provided by education and training programmes established to promote the interests of children and respect their status as victims. I recall, as an example of good practices, the figures provided by Colombia at the open debate of 25 March (see S/PV.7414): through the establishment of an intergovernmental commission that included 23 Government agencies, more than 4,000 minors recruited by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional have been reintegrated in the past 10 years.

In terms of accountability, we will continue to advocate for strengthening national judicial systems, and the cooperation of the Security Council with the International Criminal Court. The fight against impunity not only restores the dignity of the victims, but acts as a deterrent. However, we must distinguish between perpetrators and victims, as it would be a paradox to put in detention children who are soldiers but who are, first and above all, victims of armed conflict. Therefore, in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General, we are in favour of studying alternatives to criminal proceedings aimed at rehabilitation and social reintegration, always in the interest of the child. That does not mean that we cannot attribute responsibility to those responsible for their recruitment.

Finally, with regard to the mobilization of public opinion, Governments, international organizations and civil society must continue to work side by side to raise awareness among all stakeholders — from armed groups to the victims' families — of the large-scale challenge posed by all that remains to be done. The Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF have done an excellent job with the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign in collaboration with countries such as Chad and Afghanistan. Together we can help promote that agenda so that the words “child” and “soldier” are antithetical in every corner of the planet. The “No Lost Generation” campaign led by UNICEF directed at Syrian refugees, with the support 15-18380 **13/96 18/06/2015** Children and armed conflict **S/PV.7466** of the European Union and Turkey, is yielding good results. On 19 May, during the holding of the second open debate of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on children and armed conflict, there were notable examples of good practices, even in very difficult situations, such as in the Central African Republic.

I would like to conclude by thanking you, Mr. President, once again for convening this important and timely debate, which has allowed us to adopt a resolution that strengthens the fight against the cruelty that affects the youngest and most innocent members of the human race. We cannot remain indifferent to the manipulation of lives that are just starting and have the right to develop without being forever marked by violence and hatred. Debates and resolutions like today's are morally and politically imperative. When it comes to the protection of children, no effort is too great, given the size of the challenge. The international community and the Council can count on Spain to relentlessly address this challenge.