

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

Statement made by Rycroft, Representative of United Kingdom to the United Nations

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I welcome the leadership that Malaysia has shown on this important issue, and I am pleased at the unanimous adoption of resolution 2225 (2015). I also thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative Ms. Zerrougui and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Brandt for their briefings. I welcome the powerful words of Ms. Eunice Apio. Her insights into the consequences of abduction require us all to reflect deeply. She has underscored the importance of the Security Council hearing from those working directly on these issues.

Last week, a 17-year-old British boy, a child, died in an attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on an oil refinery in Iraq. His name was Talha Asmal. To those who knew him, he was an ordinary Yorkshire lad. He was friendly, kind; he worked hard at school. He should have been looking forward to university. Instead, he died a long way from home. Amid the tragedy that left 11 people dead, a sad truth emerged: Talha was not an innocent bystander caught up in the attack, he was a suicide bomber. Talha was a perpetrator, but also a victim. He was a victim of

ISIL and its sickening propaganda. He was a victim of violent extremists too cowardly to act themselves. He was a victim of an increasingly violent world that does not distinguish between children and adults in conflicts. I do not seek to excuse Talha's actions. What he did was barbaric and un-Islamic. But in highlighting this example from my own country, I hope to illustrate that we all face challenges to do with children and armed conflict. It is truly a global issue, and it requires a global response.

Through today's resolution, we have taken a step forward. The expansion of the listing criteria to include abductions will enhance our ability to hold perpetrators to account. The need is great. In February, at least 89 boys were kidnapped in the Upper Nile state in South Sudan. These are in addition to the hundreds of children abducted by ISIL — and by Boko Haram, as our Nigerian colleague so eloquently described in 2014 (see S/PV.7259), making that arguably the worst year for children in recent memory. Those sick groups abduct children to use them forcibly as child soldiers. They bind them into sexual slavery and turn them into weapons of war to terrorize families and communities. The trigger in a new resolution is a clear declaration from the Security Council that we will not tolerate the abduction of children in any form or for any purpose.

But listing is just the first step towards ending impunity. We want to see more progress on ensuring accountability. States must exercise their national jurisdiction to bring those listed to account, and if they fail to do so, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has an important role to play. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) notes, the transfer to the ICC of Dominic Ongwen, who himself was abducted as a child in 1989, shows that we must take a long-term approach. We have seen some progress this year, including the conviction and sentencing of Thomas Lubanga, and we welcome the fact that Bosco Ntaganda's trial will commence shortly.

More needs to be done. In the case of Syria we cannot afford to become numb to the recruitment, detention, torture, killing and maiming in that children in that country — whether by the regime, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or others. There is a clear call for action by the international community. The Secretary-General's report sets out the case: 889 schools attacked, 413 medical facilities damaged, 368 children killed and 771 injured. All of these events took place in 2014. The Secretary-General's report shows that the vast majority of those acts were committed by Syrian Government forces. Thus such, the United Kingdom believes adamantly that situation in Syria must be referred to the ICC.

There are ways out. In Syria we maintain that this must be through a political solution; there can be no military solution. We support the efforts of Special Envoy de Mistura to take forward the implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and ultimately enable the Syrian people to decide their own future.

Across the world, there is a way out. The roles that they play are listed in the Secretary-General's report. Whether Government or non-State armed groups, they can adopt concrete, time-bound action plans to halt violations and abuses. Eventually, that can lead to delisting. Action plans work. We congratulate Chad for the

successful delisting of the Chadian national army last year, following the full implementation of their action plan. I call on all listed parties — Governments and non-State armed groups — to follow their example.

I would like to conclude with this final point. How a society treats its most vulnerable — be they children, the infirm or elderly — is always a measure of its humanity, and even more so during instability and conflict. When a society begins to disregard the vulnerable and their rights, instability and conflict will only grow. The litany of violations and abuses against children in the Secretary-General's report is evidence of that spread. It has spread so far that children across the world, whether from Syria or Yorkshire, are now caught up as both victims and tools of conflict. Through today's resolution we have taken one step forward to ending that, but many more steps will be needed if we are to eradicate this problem. We cannot waver in our resolve.