

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

*Statement made by David Pressman, Representative of United States to the United Nations*

I would like to begin by thanking Foreign Minister Aman for presiding over this meeting and for Malaysia's leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Brandt for their briefings and their important work on this issue, as well as, in particular, our guest briefer, Eunice Apio, for her powerful words today and for the tremendous work that she and Facilitation for Peace and Development are doing to help women and children recover from armed conflict.

Let me say first that we share the outrage of Special Representative Zerrougui at recent reports of children being unlawfully targeted and killed and sexually assaulted in Unity state, South Sudan, apparently by Government forces or Government-backed militias. According to UNICEF, as many as 129 children from Unity state were killed during only three weeks last month. Survivors reported that boys were castrated and left to bleed to death, girls raped and children tied together, their throats slit. Those heinous crimes must not go unanswered, and it is for each of us to make clear to the perpetrators that their actions against their fellows citizens will have a cost. The United States will work with other Member States in the Council and through other forums to respond to the call to action that those barbaric crimes demand to protect the children of South Sudan and to ensure that the perpetrators of those acts are held accountable.

The Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict should be a valuable and trusted resource for advancing accountability against the world's most serious abusers of children. This year alone we have seen the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) publicly execute and stone children. We have seen kids manipulated to literally explode themselves in the service of Boko Haram terrorists, and the continued unlawful recruitment and use of children in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan.

The Secretary-General's annual report should contribute to our common cause to protect children by using standards that are applied uniformly when documenting the actions of all parties in conflict, so that it is perceived as credible, objective and non-political. But if that report is politicized, if it becomes more of a political tool to advance political agendas rather than a clear application of facts to objective standards, it will be seriously compromised. 15-18380 27/96 18/06/2015 Children and armed conflict S/PV.7466

Let us be clear. The idea that the Government of Israel would be listed on the same page as ISIL, Boko Haram or Syria, as some have suggested in this debate, is factually and fundamentally wrong. The comparisons of casualty numbers that we have heard from some today are totally misleading. Multiple United Nations agencies and this year's report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) have explicitly stated that the casualty numbers in Syria cannot be verified and are almost certainly underreported. Comparing those underreported numbers to documented deaths meets no standard of credibility and seems like a blatant attempt to vilify rather than illuminate.

We welcome the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) and the addition of abductions as a trigger for being listed in the Secretary-General's annex. Mass abductions, especially of young women and children, are becoming part of the extremists' playbook for terrorizing communities, and the United States supports fully the attention that this violation will now receive. Today I want to highlight what we can do better to help children victimized by armed conflict.

First and foremost, it is obviously the responsibility of States and armed groups to stop taking children from their homes to engage in hostilities. We have made some progress in places such as the Central African Republic, where armed groups recently agreed to stop recruiting child soldiers and committed to releasing the 6,000 to 10,000 child soldiers currently in their ranks. But promising to release children is just the beginning — in fact, releasing those children from armed forces and armed groups is itself also just the beginning. The work of reintegrating them — meaningfully, compassionately, respectfully — is critical and all too often overlooked. It is a long path to recovery, and our collective attention span to the challenge needs to be expanded.

After Boko Haram militants attacked and burned down the village of a 16-year-old girl in Nigeria last year, they made her watch as her captors brutally killed her neighbours. Her captors beat her when she tried to escape. When she finally managed to escape in June, she was met with rejection and suspicion by her neighbours who had survived the massacre. They stigmatized her and other girls escaping from Boko Haram, taunting them and calling them "Boko Haram wives",

leaving the escaped girls isolated and alone. And that young girl, pregnant with the child of her captor, continues to struggle — like so many liberated children — through psychological and physical trauma.

On top of all of that, for those who have escaped or have been released or rescued, many have missed whatever educational and other opportunities that may have existed. Suffering physically and psychologically and lacking opportunity, these children are not only in pain, they are caught in a terrible bind. That is why initiatives like the one launched by the United States last March, a public-private partnership that has created spaces to provide support, has deployed mobile clinics and outreach workers in Iraq and has supported Yezidi women and girls who escaped captivity, are so important.

Of course, the best way to give children the bright future that we want them to have is to protect them from harm in the first place. That is why tools like the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008 in the United States are critical. We urge other Governments to adopt similar legislation to help end the practice of the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers by holding accountable Governments that violate those basic principles. Under that United States law, foreign Governments that unlawfully recruit or use child soldiers, or that support armed groups that do so, are subject to restrictions on certain United States security assistance and the commercial licensing of military equipment, as they should be.

We also lead by example when engaged in military operations. United States forces receive training in civilian protection throughout their careers; it is woven throughout military doctrine. The imperative to avoid harming civilians, including children, has become even more explicit in recent tactical directives from our commanders to their forces, directives that go beyond what is required under international law and often result in forces having to assume additional operational and other risks in order to minimize the possibility of harming children. It is the right thing to do, and other militaries should follow that example.

When those engaged in or supporting peacekeeping efforts are accused of abusing the very children whom they are sent to protect, there must be zero tolerance. There is no room in United Nations peacekeeping or in any regional or national missions for those who prey on the vulnerable.

As the Secretary-General's report shows, too many States and armed groups are not living up to their minimum obligations under international law. That is why we have convened here today, and that is why we call on all of our colleagues to commit ourselves once again 28/96 15-18380 S/PV.7466 Children and armed conflict 18/06/2015 to documenting violations and abuses against children, to take seriously the need for rigorous standards and methodology in monitoring and reporting across all trigger events — now including abductions — and to do all we can to help children who have been through such horrendous experiences in armed conflict to recover.

Children who have been touched by armed conflict deserve to live meaningful lives that are free from violence and the painful effects of their experiences. They deserve to experience life beyond war, and it is our responsibility to ensure that they will.