

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict 19th of September 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Dr. Zahir Tanin, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations

Mr. President,

Please allow me to begin by congratulating you on your assumption of this month's Presidency of the Council, and I thank you for convening this meeting. I would also like to congratulate Ms. Leila Zerrougui on her appointment as the new Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict and I wish her the best in her new role. I express our appreciation to Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, for her dedication and leadership on this issue throughout her tenure as Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

Mr. President,

Fifty-three percent of Afghans are under 18 years of age. Tragically, these young people have grown up in an atmosphere of war and violence. Despite the unfortunate circumstances of their upbringing, these young people are full of hope. They represent the future of Afghanistan; they will be the ones to carry forward our vision of a safe and vibrant nation with growing economic opportunities, and equality for its citizens, male and female. My government is committed to ensuring our country's bright future by protecting our children and fostering their development.

Mr. President,

Children in Afghanistan suffer from the consequences of the terrorism and violence of the Taliban, al Qaeda, and terrorist groups. These groups are responsible for brutal acts against civilians, such as the Taliban attacks targeting girls' schools in 2012 using poisonous gas. Last year, 1,396 Afghan children were killed or maimed. Seventy-four percent of all child casualties in Afghanistan are caused by the aforementioned armed groups. Therefore, any course of action that seeks to ameliorate the well-being of Afghan children must also focus on diminishing the influence of terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan.

Children are being coerced to serve in armed conflict in Afghanistan, by the very terrorist and extremist groups that continue to commit heinous acts against children. We have experienced devastating situations in which children are forced to carry out suicide attacks or to smuggle weapons across the border. The use of children as a weapon of war is an atrocious crime which must be addressed with firm conviction.

Mr. President,

Just as the challenges for Afghan children need to be recognized, so too does their progress. In Afghanistan, we have seen encouraging progress in our crucial efforts to protect our children and ensure their promising future. Here are some examples of meaningful measures taken by the Government of Afghanistan to protect and address the needs of children in armed conflict: First, in February 2012, The Ministry of Justice began drafting a comprehensive legal code to protect Afghan children. The Ministry of Justice has consulted closely with UNICEF throughout the process, and we look forward to a product that will truly benefit the wellbeing of Afghan

children. We also published our 2012 report on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, and we look forward to hearing reactions.

Second, the Ministry of Justice has established the General Directorate of Human Rights Protection, which will serve to oversee the upholding of Human Rights in all Government activities.

Third, we have expanded our birth registration system to cover all 34 provinces. Until recently, birth registration was only available in 6 provinces, and the expansion of this system throughout Afghanistan will greatly improve age verification procedures for recruiters so that they can recruit in accordance with the Ministry of the Interior's age requirement provision.

Mr. President,

We must continue to our efforts to prevent underage recruitment in our armed forces. It is our goal to ensure that 18 years of age is the minimum age for recruitment to participate in police activity. To this end we have acted decisively. In 2011, Afghanistan's Ministry of the Interior published an order that mandated, and I quote "in no circumstances shall individuals under 18 or over 35 be recruited or deployed to military services, and if such people are recruited or deployed, officials shall be treated as legal offenders."

Recruitment into armed forces is indicative of a far greater problem facing children: a lack of opportunity. It is crucial that we reintegrate these young people into society and provide them career opportunities. To this end, we have created training centers for children leaving military service to train for professional and technical careers.

Mr. President,

I am encouraged by the progress made by the international community to protect children in Afghanistan and other countries. In 2011, the Special Representative reported that ten thousand children worldwide were freed from their association with armed groups because of action plans put in place by the United Nations and the parties involved in the conflict.

Mr. President,

Everyone here today knows the trials and tribulations that face a state like Afghanistan, one that has been subjected to multiple prolonged conflicts. In addition to insecurity, many issues threaten children in armed conflict. Tragically, sexual abuse of children still occurs in all parts of the world including Afghanistan. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, the Martyred and Disabled (MoLSAMD) has been tasked with designing an effective strategy that will coordinate efforts with national and international organizations, including UNICEF, to combat the sexual abuse of children.

Mr. President,

All children deserve the right to live in a safe, secure country that is rich with education and opportunity. Since 2001, The Government of Afghanistan has been implementing policies aimed towards these objectives, but there is obviously still much work to be done. The Afghan Government is fully committed to fostering a domestic environment that will enable all Afghan children to reach their full potential. As I have said in this body before, this is the only way for

Afghanistan to end a period of over thirty years of conflict and fully transition into a peaceful, safe country for all.

Thank you.