

Children and Armed Conflict
12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Goledzinowski , Permanent Representative to Australia

Mr. Goledzinowski (Australia): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important debate. We always say that, of course, but I think that this issue does have special resonance.

Before I deliver my statement, I would like to say that, as a member of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, we are very pleased to associate ourselves with the statement delivered this morning by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group.

Australia welcomes the Security Council's demonstrated commitment to addressing grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. That commitment has yielded notable and tangible results. In that regard, we congratulate Afghanistan for signing the comprehensive action plan to halt child recruitment and other violations by the Afghan National Security Forces, only 12 months after the Afghan National Police was listed by the Secretary-General on recruitment grounds. We also commend progress in the Philippines towards the development of an action plan with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines to ensure that children will not be recruited into the New People's Army or involved in the conflict there. We hope that the Government in Myanmar will allow Special Representative of the Secretary-General Commaraswamy to have access to non-State armed groups so that action plans can be negotiated, allowing some such groups in the country to be delisted.

Despite those successes, in his latest report (S/2011/250) the Secretary-General notes that attacks and threats of attacks against educational and medical facilities are a growing trend and are of significant concern. We also note that such attacks are in contravention of international law. Clearly, there is still work to be done. Attacks on schools affect not only children and youth but communities as a whole, undermining efforts to reduce poverty. We therefore welcome the resolution adopted today (resolution 1998 (2011)), which expands the listing criteria to include the grave violations of attacks on schools and hospitals and credible threats or attacks against school children and educational and medical personnel. The inclusion of both schools and hospitals reflects the relationship between access to education and medical services and the survival, development and well-being of children.

We encourage the Working Group to fully utilize the toolkit available to it, including the use of emergency or irregular briefings, in line with the Group's terms of reference, to enable it to respond to surges in grave violations in a timely and flexible manner, particularly when they occur outside of the cycle of country reports and conclusions. The briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the Working Group's formal meeting in May is a good example of how this could work in practice. Australia firmly believes that Working Group field trips, such as those recently undertaken in Nepal and Afghanistan, are powerful tools for securing commitments by listed parties. We hope that the Working Group will undertake further field visits in 2011.

Like others, we would like to welcome the work of Special Representative Coomaraswamy on the protection of children in situations of armed conflict, including through her field visits, which represent an important means by which the Council's recommendations are realized and acted upon at the ground level.

We look forward to increasing consideration by the Council sanctions committees of perpetrators of grave violations against children. We note that in 2010, for the first time, an individual in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was listed under the sanctions regime on such grounds. We are concerned that some persistent perpetrators cannot be held accountable through targeted measures, given the absence of designated sanctions committees. We call on the Council to address this accountability gap on an urgent basis. In conclusion, the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict have made significant advances in ensuring the protection of children in armed conflict. However, while we celebrate our collective successes, we must also recognize that challenges remain. We all share the responsibility of ensuring that those who abuse children in times of conflict do not go unpunished. We look to the strength and the commitment of the Security Council to lead us in that regard.