

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

Statement by Mr. Alkalaj, Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to you, Minister Westerwelle, for presiding over this important debate. Bosnia and Herzegovina welcomes and commends the efforts of your country as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Our thanks also go to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his statement and to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their comprehensive briefings.

Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches the utmost importance to the protection of children affected by armed conflict, and strongly condemns all violations of international law committed against children in conflict situations, including recruitment, killing, maiming, rape and other sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. We wish to emphasize the primary responsibility of States to respect and assure the human rights of all individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction, as provided for by relevant international law. In addition, we stress that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, constitute the standard in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child in armed conflict.

However, bearing in mind that all parties to armed conflict should comply strictly with international obligations, we are deeply concerned over the continued violation, with impunity, of the relevant provisions of international law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict. All available tools should be used to end impunity for violations committed against children. The perpetrators must be brought to justice and held accountable. This will send a clear signal that violations and abuses against children in situations of armed conflict will not be tolerated and will not go unpunished.

In particular, more vigorous and targeted measures against persistent offenders must be applied when appropriate. We call on the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to continue the established practice of briefing the sanctions committees and, in particular, providing concrete recommendations from the Secretary-General's reports and from the conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for country-specific situations.

We are also confident that resolutions 1882 (2009) and 1960 (2010) have contributed to establishing practical means to bridge the difficulty of collecting, systematizing and verifying information on sexual violence in conflict situations, while retaining the separate focus of each mandate. In that regard, we also fully support the cooperation between the Special Representatives for Children and Armed Conflict and for Sexual Violence in Conflict regarding parties responsible for rape and sexual violence. We also support and emphasize the importance of the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflicts.

While we welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2011/250), we call on all parties listed in its annexes to respect their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, to halt violations, to enter into dialogue with the United Nations, and to commit to preparing and implementing time-bound action plans. That dialogue needs to be facilitated in close cooperation and with the consent of the host Government. In the same vein, preparation and implementation of time-bound action plans should be carried out and coordinated efficiently with all relevant actors in the field, including the host Government, United Nations entities, civil society organizations and donors. It is essential that such efforts be provided with proper resources and funding in the countries where monitoring and reporting mechanisms are being implemented.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is encouraged that a number of parties have signed action plans with the United Nations aimed at ending the recruitment and use of children in conflicts. We also welcome the development of guidance on resolution 1882 (2009) and subsequent action plans. Furthermore, we wish to stress that effective reintegration programmes for children recruited by armed forces are a critical element in sustainable peace and security, and, more importantly, in ensuring the welfare of those children.

Last year, Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the main sponsors of General Assembly resolution 64/290, entitled “The right to education in emergency situations”. We would like to recall that the resolution — which emphasizes that all possible measures must be taken to ensure the right to education in all phases of emergency situations, and calls for the criminalization under domestic laws of attacks on schools — was adopted in the General Assembly by consensus. We are deeply concerned about the number of attacks, as well as of threatened attacks and closures of schools and hospitals in situations of armed conflict, and about military use of schools and hospitals contrary to international humanitarian law. We are convinced that effectively addressing issues related to attacks on schools and hospitals will ensure that children are not denied their right to education during or after a conflict.

In addition, I would like to discuss some elements and facts derived from Bosnia and Herzegovina’s experience, reminding the Council that among the more than 10,000 people who were killed in the besieged city of Sarajevo were 1,500 children, as well as many other children throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were innocent children who will never attend school or play again. Related to that was the reburial yesterday, on the sixteenth anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, of an 11-year-old boy, Nesib Muhić, and his 15-year-old brother Hasib, who were among the 613 newly identified bodies. And they were not the only ones. Let us, from this Chamber, send a strong message that such crimes against children will be firmly condemned and punished, and will not be tolerated.

We therefore firmly believe that the Security Council should remain committed to protecting children in armed conflict, including through determination to ensure the full implementation of and respect for its resolutions on this issue. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands ready to contribute to that aim.