

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict, June 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mrs. Malenga, Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations.

I would like to ask the interpreters to listen carefully to my statement, as I will try to details in view of the limited time available. At the outset, I would like to say how pleased I am, Sir, to see you presiding over the Security Council for the month of June. My delegation is grateful to the Council for putting on its agenda an issue that particularly affects the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that of children and armed conflict. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the issue (S/2013/245). And I thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Ms. Yoka Brandt and Mr. Gregory Ramm for their work on the problem of children and armed conflict.

On 28 June 2012 Mrs. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, stated in her annual report to the Human Rights Council in Geneva that “thousands of children continue to be killed, maimed, abducted, subjected to sexual violence, denied humanitarian access and deprived of health care in many countries” (A/HRC/21/38, para. 2).

She went on to say that in several countries children were also “used as suicide bombers and human shields”. That description corresponds exactly to the purgatory that Congolese children endure daily owing to the presence of various foreign and domestic armed groups, particularly the rebels of the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M-23), the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda and others who plunder the western part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In fact, the language of weapons and violence has resurfaced in North Kivu since the M-23 rebels who deserted from the ranks of the Congolese army in April 2012 turned their weapons on the regular army. The conflict situation currently prevailing in that part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and more specifically in and around North Kivu, has led to a resurgence in violence and crime, the primary victims of which are women and children.

Massive displacements due to violence continue in North Kivu, where it is well known that many children are kidnapped by the rebel forces of M-23 and pressed into forced labour for mining. Children are also used to break up rocks to make gravel in quarries. Once broken up, coltan is used in electronic devices. The highly radioactive nature of that substance explains the frequency of respiratory ailments, which are sometimes fatal, among those who handle it. Many Congolese children have been used to transport and mine coltan. Those who survive are traumatized by the acts of vandalism and barbarity committed against them by M-23 rebels.

Thousands of child victims of violent attacks by M-23 have suffered serious physical and psychological damage. Adequate reparations are needed to cover emotional damage, for example in cases of depression, loss of self-esteem, stress, involuntary abortions for young girls who were raped, infant mortality and sexually transmitted infections.

In areas affected by insecurity, education has been suspended because dozens of classrooms have been destroyed, and some schools are overcrowded due to the arrival of displaced children or are serving as temporary housing for persons displaced within their own countries.

My delegation is speaking on behalf of children whose families, usually in dire economic straits,

cherish the hope that concrete steps will be taken to provide them with reparations. In terms of education, children displaced by fighting have virtually no access to school, which makes them more vulnerable to being recruited by armed groups. We also note that many schools have not resumed classes following the clashes provoked by armed groups in South Kivu. Moreover, it remains true that in recent years the armed forces and non-State armed groups have used schools and universities for military purposes in violation of the right to education laid out in the main international instruments on human rights. Their acts constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity.

My delegation takes this opportunity to appeal to the armed groups operating in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to put an end to their mistreatment of children and to comply with their international obligation to protect the safety and rights of children.

In terms of security, the Security Council must take into account the protection of children's rights, including in peace negotiations, and the urgent need to end impunity for crimes against children. It must also support the development of programmes and policies to protect children and improve their living conditions.

In conclusion, my delegation protests the intentional and generalized targeting of schools, teachers and students as a tactic of war. In his 2013 annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2013/245), the Secretary-General recognizes that the military use of schools is widespread. Of the 22 cases covered in the report, 19 involve violations related to education, including schools being bombed and razed by the warring parties and students and education personnel being threatened, kidnapped and killed.

Finally, my delegation welcomes the Security Council's commitment to working for the protection of children from serious violations committed against them in armed conflict.