

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

Statement by Mr. Mayr-Harting, Permanent Mission of the European Union to the United Nations

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The acceding country Croatia, the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and the German presidency for organizing this very important debate and for the leadership you have constantly shown on this issue. The European Union is very grateful for Germany's efforts, initiatives and continuous endeavours, including in the Security Council Working Group that you, Sir, chair.

Allow me to use this opportunity to express our appreciation to former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Radhika Coomaraswamy for her highly esteemed work. Her relentless effort has contributed immensely to the progress we witnessed during her mandate. I would also like to warmly welcome the new Special Representative, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and to assure her of the full support of the European Union.

The annual report of the Secretary General on children and armed conflict (S/2012/261) reminds us of the importance of the Security Council's work on that issue, which we highly appreciate. We have seen continuous progress in many aspects and different regions — for example, through the conclusion of several action plans leading to the release and subsequent reintegration of children. Still, we have also witnessed deterioration in other places, such as Syria, where many children are among the victims of egregious crimes and where the tremendous suffering of girls and boys has been going on for much too long. As long as children still suffer from armed conflict, we are reminded that we have to further intensify our work.

It is of special significance to us that for the first time the Secretary-General included attacks on schools and hospitals in his annual report, in accordance with the expanded list of triggers from last year's ground-breaking resolution 1989 (2011). That expansion of triggers and their effective implementation means concrete progress for the instruments at the disposal of the Security Council's Working Group, thereby contributing effectively to improving the situation for the children concerned.

The reports of the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict also illustrate the severe problem of persistent perpetrators — an issue that increasingly needs our particular attention. While it is essential to continuously name the relevant conflict parties, the Security Council also has to look for effective ways to take action, combat impunity and prove that the 32 persistent perpetrators currently listed will eventually be held accountable for their heinous crimes, including by imposing targeted sanctions. Let us not accept impunity. Encouraging steps have been taken by the International Criminal Court, for example by the recent judgment in the Lubanga trial on the war crime of conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15 and making them participate actively in hostilities.

The recommendations of the former Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Ambassador De la Sablière, upon the request of the Special Representative, provide interesting food for thought in this context. The toolbox of the Security Council's Working Group needs to be applied, with effective links between the Working Group, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the existing sanctions committees. Especially when establishing or renewing the mandate of relevant sanctions regimes, it should be considered to include provisions against parties to armed conflict that engage in activities in violation of applicable international law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict. Dialogue and increased political pressure and cooperation with national and international courts will also be important. Furthermore, we encourage the Council to regularly invite the Special Representative to provide briefings on situations of armed conflict that affect children.

The implementation of existing commitments is crucial. Let me update the Council on some of the steps taken by the European Union to contribute to our common goal. High Representative Ashton has named the rights of the child as one of the three priorities in her joint communication on human rights. Consequently, the EU is systematically including child protection issues in all EU foreign policy missions, operations and training, and has committed to further step up its implementation. The European Union has spent

€200 million in 2009-2012 on assistance to children and armed conflict in the countries listed in the Secretary-General's report. To cite just one example, the EU's police mission in Afghanistan provided training on child protection, and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the European Union has cooperated with the United Nations and local police in child protection and juvenile justice projects.

The humanitarian work of the EU also aims at protecting children in conflict-affected areas. We continue to strongly support the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of

children, child prostitution and child pornography. Those are just some of the examples of our dedication in this field.

Far too many children in too many parts of the world still suffer every day from the effects of armed conflict or are directly involved as child soldiers. Children should attend school, play with their peers and be able to enjoy their childhood without suffering from the effects of war and armed conflict. Let us do our utmost to further improve their lives by intensifying the use of the instruments at the disposal of the Security Council.