

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

Statement by Mr. Araud, Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations

(spoke in French): I should like at the outset to thank those who spoke before me for the explanations they have provided, and I very warmly welcome the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui. On behalf of my delegation, I wish her every success in her important new role.

I shall be relatively brief. Many of my colleagues have already said what I wanted to say, in particular in terms of emphasizing that the mechanism we have devised for the protection of children in armed conflict shows that our Organization is faithful to its ideals in responding to the demands of our collective conscience. The mechanism, a successful endeavour on the part of the United Nations, makes it possible to demobilize more than 10,000 child soldiers per year. That success is attributable first and foremost to the work done by Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy over the past six years, and I should like, as my colleagues have done before me, to thank her.

But that success is due also to the instruments with which we have equipped ourselves, which have made possible the signing of 20 action plans, the last two of them over the summer, with the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and the Government of Burma. We are also pleased to learn that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is ready to sign a new plan of action and that negotiations have begun with Libya.

We must persist in our efforts in order to achieve a world without child soldiers in 25 years, including the goal set by Ms. Coomaraswamy, that of no child soldiers in Government armies in 10 years' time.

But this meeting should not be about triumphalism. Not only do a number of persistent perpetrators remain; new ones have emerged. UNICEF believes that, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 2,000 children have been forcibly recruited in the past five months in North Kivu. Reports indicate that the M-23 movement recruited dozens of children in July and August to use in its fight against the Congolese armed forces.

Because of the deliberate attacks targeting schools and hospitals in Syria, which are often turned into centres for detention and torture, and because of the acts of violence committed against

children, who are being tortured, raped and killed outright, this year the Syrian army and its auxiliary forces have been put on the list of infamy. Let us recall that 49 children's bodies were discovered by United Nations observers lying among those of the 108 victims of the Houla massacre, who had been mowed down by Syrian artillery and had had their throats cut by its auxiliary forces.

We must also enhance and strengthen our instruments, in particular to deal with the problem of persistent perpetrators, which have been on the list of infamy for five years or more and continue to violate children's rights with impunity; today they number 32. In most cases, we have no means of effectively punishing such violators, which undermines the credibility of the child-protection mechanism established by the Council.

France therefore would wish to see the strengthening of measures to combat impunity. It was in that spirit that we adopted resolution 1998 (2011) and that today we adopted resolution 2068 (2012). But we need to go still further. For guidance we can turn to the recommendations made by the former Permanent Representative of France, Ambassador De La Sablière, in his report, which was requested by the previous Special Representative. The report recommends that the problem of persistent perpetrators be tackled at the appropriate political level by means of Council consultations and press statements and by encouraging the Working Group to ensure concrete follow-up of the issue. Targeted measures must also be devised. The Working Group could, for example, become an ad hoc sanctions committee when the situation so requires.

We also would be in favour of enhanced dialogue with the International Criminal Court. That could mean at first an invitation to the Prosecutor, Ms. Fatou Bensouda, to brief the Council on this issue. France would like these proposals to be considered by the Working Group.

The Council's Working Group must also be endowed with the resources necessary to accomplish its task. We therefore trust that field missions will continue at the current pace, following those to Nepal and Afghanistan in 2011. We would like to see their funding earmarked as new measures under the regular budget for 2013-2014, which will be adopted in the fall.

I wish to conclude by saying that together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and our partners in the steering committee, we will convene the fifth ministerial follow-up Forum on the Paris Commitments and the Paris Principles in November. The Paris Principles and Commitments are complementary to Security Council action, and we call on all States Members of the United Nations to endorse them as soon as possible.

I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, as well as your team for the manner in which you have chaired the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and I thank you for having convened this debate.

I cannot conclude, however, without ruing the fact that not all Council members agreed to the text that was adopted. Unanimity was possible and could have been achieved had certain States foregone their

attempts to weaken our measures and to politicize United Nations action in this sphere. Only the rejection of politicization and adherence to the text will allow the United Nations to remain faithful to our ideals in this major undertaking.