

Children and Armed Conflict

12 July 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General

I thank Germany for having organized this open debate, and I thank the Council for its sustained commitment to the protection of children affected by armed conflict. I should like to thank in particular the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany for taking the time to preside over this meeting and for his leadership.

Since 1998, the Council has adopted eight resolutions on this issue. It has asked me to report on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access to children by parties to armed conflict. It has sent a consistent and clear message: the protection of children in armed conflict is a peace and security issue, and the international community will not tolerate grave violations of this principle.

Today's resolution takes us one step further. It not only emphasizes that schools and hospitals should be zones of peace respected by all parties to conflict; it adds attacks on schools and hospitals as listing criteria in my annual reports on children in armed conflict. I welcome this advance. Places of learning and places of healing should never be places of war.

Our proactive efforts on previously listed violations, such as the recruitment and use of child soldiers, have yielded positive results. I thank Governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations for their work. These efforts and the action plan concept — laid out in resolution 1539 (2004) and later resolutions — have led to the signing of 15 action plans covering nine conflict arenas. Two more action plans are expected this year.

These successes show the value of naming and shaming. Last year alone, around 10,000 children associated with armed groups were released. We must now secure longer-term international support for their full reintegration into their communities. This is an essential component of peacebuilding and development.

The United Nations system is fully committed to protecting children in armed conflict. My Special Representative on this issue, Ms. Coomaraswamy, is working with dedication and courage. The work of my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Wallström, is also helping to combat impunity. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations, too, is playing an important role. It has deployed child protection advisers in at least 13 missions since 2001, and today has advisers in seven peacekeeping missions and three political missions. They are working to help missions support the implementation of Security Council resolutions. United Nations country teams, too, are making an important contribution, not only in monitoring and reporting under resolution 1612 (2005), but also in supporting reintegration and other humanitarian interventions. UNICEF, in particular, plays a key role here.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, of which Germany is the Chair. With the innovative and steadfast engagement of many partners, the Council has demonstrated that protecting children in armed conflict is both a moral and a security imperative. Let us keep working together to ensure that children everywhere can grow up safe, healthy and educated so that they can help to build a secure and sustainable future for themselves, their families and their societies.