

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict, March 7th, 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Timerman, Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations

At the outset, I wish to congratulate your country, Sir, on its presidency of the Security Council during the month of March and to thank you for inviting me to participate in today's open debate on children and armed conflict. I also acknowledge the presence of the Deputy Minister of Lithuania and the other Permanent Representatives.

Allow me first to mention something of which we are proud. Next Tuesday, in the fraternal Republic of Chile, the democratic President, Sebastian Piñera Echeñique, will hand over the presidency to another democratically elected president. That is now a tradition in Latin America that fills us with pride and satisfaction. I therefore wish to acknowledge that publicly, before the Council and the entire Chilean people.

I also wish to express our absolute solidarity with the Government and people of the People's Republic of China, who recently suffered a dreadful attack.

I welcome Luxembourg's initiative to convene this debate on an issue on which the delegation of Argentina appreciates Luxembourg's leadership in the Council through Ambassador Sylvie Lucas. We also welcome the statements of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh, whose dreadful history and moving words serve to challenge us to act urgently and with genuine conviction.

My country, Argentina, is firmly committed to the protection of children in armed conflict. That can be seen by the fact that we were one of the first States to ratify, in 2002, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the participation of children in armed conflict.

Similarly, we are committed to defending and ensuring respect for the rights of children and adolescents in every area, as is demonstrated in our Government's initiative, unanimously approved by Argentina's Congress, enacting a law stipulating a minimum age of 18 for recruitment into our armed forces, thereby observing the highest standards on children's rights.

In August we will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999), the first on the issue of children and armed conflict, supported by Argentina as a member of the Security Council at the time. In 2005, resolution 1612 (2005), also firmly supported by my country, as a non-permanent Council member, represented substantive progress in recognizing, guaranteeing and protecting the rights of children in situations of armed conflict. That resolution clearly defines acts that constitute serious violations of children's rights and establishes a monitoring and reporting mechanism that, in conjunction with child protection advisers, is a fundamental tool for ensuring the protection of children in armed conflict.

Besides such advances in formulating standards, it is important to emphasize the goals that have been achieved in preventing attacks on and protecting children's rights, through coordinated action by the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary- General, working together with UNICEF and other United Nations bodies. We certainly all believe that lessons well learned and good practices established not only apply to legal standards and effective mechanisms but also to the decision to implement action plans in a coordinated way that can have a positive impact on children's living conditions and their future in specific situations.

Such steps on the part of the international community to protect children from serious crimes and prevent such crimes being committed go hand in hand with the importance of ensuring that impunity does not prevail and that the perpetrators of serious violations of rights are held accountable for their actions. Fighting impunity for serious violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity is unquestionably the responsibility of individual States. It should be recalled, however, that the international system has provided supplementary mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) for cases where States are unable or unwilling to exercise their primary jurisdiction. The ICC is an essential body for ensuring that accountability is the standard and ethic for an international community that respects the rule of law.

Recognizing the progress that has been made does not imply in any way that we ignore or minimize the horrifying realities that daily attest to the fact that children and women are the primary victims of many types of violence and abuse in situations of armed conflict. From a human rights perspective, the protection of children must remain our priority, and must therefore be taken into consideration when defining the mandates of peacekeeping operations, special political missions and Security Council peacebuilding efforts, which should include the integration of experts into its various missions. It is equally important for States and the Organization that training and capacity-building on children and armed conflict not be limited exclusively to staff with direct responsibility for protecting children in the field.

It is also essential that we incorporate into training programmes for military, police and civilians destined for United Nations missions a human rights perspective and a thorough acquaintance with the rights of children and young people, as well as knowledge and understanding of strategies and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes for them in situations of armed conflict. Careful analysis of the various tactics for recruiting child soldiers and how to prevent their joining armed groups and conflicts, as well as the capacity to act to change violent cultural practices and traditions that perpetuate discrimination against children, is imperative. We must discard models of tutelage and recognize children as possessors of rights. In the area of potential specific measures we should also emphasize the importance of preventive measures that every State can adopt, including the implementation of a legal framework that ensures that children cannot be recruited as soldiers; in that instance, a proper registry of births is extremely valuable.

It is equally important to ensure recognition, within the framework of reintegration and reparation programmes for children who have been victims in situations of armed conflict, of their status as

possessors of rights and of the fact that they are entitled to be actors and participants in decision-making processes — not only as regards their personal plans for their lives but also within their families, communities and societies. It is also essential that we overcome interventions and processes that solidify or reproduce patterns of victimization.

Argentina believes that the Convention on the Rights of the Child must inspire and guide our decisions both in peacetime and in situations of armed conflict. In peacetime, our primary responsibility is to promote, protect and ensure children's rights through public policies and legal guarantees. In situations of armed conflict, we must strengthen protection mechanisms, generate effective tools for prevention and ensure that specific action is taken to provide comprehensive care for children who are victims of armed conflict.

In that regard, and in conclusion, I would like to pay special tribute to the human rights movement in my country, and in particular to the Asociación Madres e Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, who, through their unwavering commitment to human rights, were the principal movers of the Argentine proposal that formed the basis for the inclusion of articles 7, 8 and 11 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With the requirement that children should be registered immediately after birth and the commitment of States parties to the Convention to respect the right of a child to preserve his or her identity — measures that States must take to avoid children's illegal transfers abroad — the substance of those articles enshrines the rights of and for children that those women with their white scarves have sorrowfully and courageously handed down as a historical mandate and ethical commitment to political consistency and a legal obligation for humankind as a whole.

Lastly, I would like to assure the Council of my country's support for today's resolution 2143 (2014), of which Argentina is a sponsor.