

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

Statement by Ms. Colakovic, Permanent Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations

I would like to thank you, Madam President, and your delegation for convening this open debate and thereby showing that your country attaches particular importance to the issue of children in armed conflict.

Allow me to express our appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, and especially to Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh, for their excellent briefings today.

Bosnia and Herzegovina fully supports the adoption of the Security Council's action-oriented resolution 2143 (2014), on children in armed conflict.

I would like to start with some statistics. According to UNICEF, 10 million children were traumatized by war in the past decade. Furthermore, in armed conflict, children are the most vulnerable group in society and are often subjected to rape, sexual violence and abduction. Tens of thousands of children continue to be recruited, killed, maimed or deprived of their rights to education and health care. Poverty and conflict are frequently obstacles, as children barely in their teens are compelled to support hungry families or forced to become child soldiers or comfort wives.

The practice of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict still persists. It is a grave human rights violation. The involvement of children in armed conflict presents serious challenges on the ground for both States in conflict and for the United Nations presence. There are a number of examples that we see in the world today.

We stress the primary role of national Governments in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflicts. We also urge all parties to conflicts to fully comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law with regard to protecting the civilian population as a whole. All countries and groups must place the protection of children in situations of conflict above politics.

Education is increasingly being highlighted as essential to the advancement of society, as well as crucial to opportunity for individuals. Defining education as a fundamental human right is an important start. In spite of that recognition, we are witnessing a growing number of attacks against schools, educational facilities, teachers and pupils. Hundreds of thousands of children all over the world are today suffering from the absence of any opportunity to be appropriately educated. Two out of three children do not attend secondary school. The majority of them become completely lost, and a forgotten generation for good. Such a situation establishes a historical basis for future international peace and security challenges.

Malala Yousafzai, targeted by the Pakistani Taliban for assassination for promoting education for a generation of young men and women, stands out as a symbol for millions who are denied opportunity and access. Therefore, in times of conflict, all steps should be taken to safeguard the right to education. All parties to conflict should safeguard schools as protected areas and zones of peace for boys and girls.

What more can be done, both in practice and definition, by the United Nations and the international community? We reiterate that targeted, gradual and more vigorous measures against groups and individuals who persistently commit grave violations against children should be undertaken.

In order to end impunity for violations against children, Member States must uphold existing international standards and put into practice their obligations through accelerated national legislative reform and systematic implementation and monitoring. Perpetrators should be brought to justice in compliance with international justice mechanisms, criminal courts and tribunals. We are encouraged by the fact that some parties to armed conflict have made progress in releasing child soldiers. In that context, we stress the primary role of national Governments in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict.

With regard to the practice of reintegrating children into communities, domestic and international stakeholders dealing with situations of conflict in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations often face difficulties. To resolve such complex issues, efficient coordination among different actors is needed, including by the host country, host Government, United Nations entities, donors and non-governmental organizations. Special attention should be given to refugees and displaced children, children with disabilities and those who have been subjected to sexual violence. We believe that their participation in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration practices is critical.

In addition, we believe that the cooperation and exchange of information between the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the relevant Sanctions Committees should be improved. We commend the “Children, not soldiers” campaign of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflict. Regional and subregional organizations have an important role to play in the promotion and protection of children’s rights.

United Nations-mandated institutions, including the Offices of the Special Rapporteurs, UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council, provide regular reviews on the status of, and respect for, human rights within the borders of any United Nations State Member. The protection of children must remain at the top of any review agenda for the sake of our future.

When we talk about the future of child protection, we should also keep in perspective the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development framework. During the discussion in the Open Group on Sustainable Development Goals in February, many countries voiced the issue of conflict and violence prevention and the pursuit of durable peace as one of the starting points or prerequisites of development and sustainable development. Furthermore, education is promoted as one of the most critical priorities among the Millennium Development Goals.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that the Security Council should remain committed to the protection of children in armed conflict, including through determination to ensure the full implementation of, and respect for, its resolutions on the issue. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands ready to contribute to that aim.