

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

Statement by Mr. Ntwaagae, Permanent Mission of Botswana to the United Nations

I would like to join other delegations that spoke before me in extending our sincere congratulations to you, Madam President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of March. In the same vein, I wish to thank you on behalf of my delegation for convening today's open debate on the very important theme of children and armed conflict.

We thank the Secretary-General for his latest annual report (S/2013/245), which not only highlights the progress that has been made in protecting children in countries affected by conflict, but also documents how the evolving character of war is creating unprecedented risks for our children. We are also encouraged by the Security Council's continued focus on the subject and wish to emphasize the need for greater and more systematic attention to be paid to the agenda of children and armed conflict in the Council's own work.

Recognizing that ending violations of the rights of children is a moral imperative that we must collectively commit to achieving, Botswana reaffirms the importance it attaches to the protection and promotion of the rights of children, including in the context of armed conflict. To that end, we strongly support all efforts aimed at protecting the rights of children, including the mandate and work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, among others. My delegation also welcomes yesterday's launch of the "Children, not soldiers" campaign organized by UNICEF, the Special Representative and the Luxembourg Permanent Mission. We believe the launch was timely and will go a long way to complementing ongoing efforts to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

Despite the commendable progress highlighted in the report, we remain deeply concerned that children continue to be recruited, killed, maimed, sexually abused and deprived of their childhood and their right to education and health care, among other things. It is disheartening to note that in some ongoing crises, such acts have become systematic and widespread. In line with the principle of the responsibility to protect, Botswana believes that States have primary responsibility for protecting their own populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including protecting children from the risk of war.

My delegation also wishes to reiterate that impunity for violations against children is unacceptable and must never be tolerated. In that regard, we wish to stress the urgency and importance of enhancing political will and commitment in order to address the tragic plight of children in armed conflict. To that end, a focus on national ownership and responsibility, and on engagement with concerned Governments and armed groups to establish commitments to accountability, as well as the systematic monitoring of such commitments, represents the highest possible priority and importance for my delegation. We therefore call on the Security Council to continue its efforts to fight impunity and enforce accountability, including by adopting targeted measures against persistent perpetrators of violations against children and their referral to the International Criminal Court.

Regarding the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, we believe that allowing the access necessary for reaching vulnerable populations, particularly children in situations of armed conflict, is essential.

Botswana believes that strengthening global efforts to end the recruitment and use of children in armed

conflict should be consistent with and complementary to wider efforts to promote the implementation of Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict and of other resolutions regarding the promotion and protection of the rights of children. In that regard, we welcome several States' significant efforts to implement those resolutions, including resolution 1612 (2005) and 2068 (2012), and believe that they should continue to be vigorously pursued. We also share the view that such efforts should be supported so as to strengthen national capacities for child protection, investigation and prosecution and accountability mechanisms, as well as the establishment of age verification processes in military recruitment.

As the well-known children's rights activist, Graça Machel, once said, "The impact of armed conflict on children must be everyone's concern and is everyone's responsibility" (*A/51/306, para. 317*). We remain optimistic that given our collective will and responsibility, we can bring an end to the shameful crimes currently prevailing against children.

To conclude, we welcome the adoption today of resolution 2143 (2014) on children and armed conflict. Its adoption by consensus indicates the willingness of Council members and, indeed, the general membership of the United Nations, to move ahead on this agenda and focus on areas that have not received much attention in the past.