

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

Statement by Mr. Patriota, Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate, and through you I wish to express our appreciation of Minister Jean Asselborn's personal leadership in this matter. I should like to thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui and Mr. Anthony Lake for their presentations. Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh's testimony about his experience as a child soldier in Sierra Leone reminded us of the horrors to which some children are still subject to this day.

Stopping the plight endured by children in armed conflict is a moral imperative. Children in conflict situations are particularly vulnerable. Their suffering extends in time, in the form of traumas that burden entire generations for many years after the resolution of a crisis. The Security Council is right to help increase awareness about violations and to be more involved in preventing and halting violence against children in cases determined by the Council to constitute threats to international peace and security.

As the concept note prepared by the Mission of Luxembourg points out (S/2014/144, annex), the consideration of the agenda related to children in armed conflict has significantly progressed in the past years. The international community has been able to take decisive steps to confront the gravest challenges regarding children in conflict. The initiative launched by Special Representative Zerrougui and UNICEF to end the recruitment of children by Government forces by 2016 deserves our full support. We are convinced that, with political will by all parties involved, that target can be achieved. Nevertheless, the reality on the ground in many conflicts remains a source of serious concern.

The appalling situation of children in Syria was rightly described by the Secretary-General as unspeakable and unacceptable. The High Commissioner for Human Rights reminded us in her presentation to the General Assembly on the humanitarian situation in Syria that grave violations against children have been committed by both sides, with documented cases of detentions, torture, sexual violence and executions. The number of schools and hospitals that have been seriously affected by the conflict is alarming. Those acts violate the most fundamental rules of international humanitarian law. To deprive children of education and access to health is to deprive them of paramount tools to build a peaceful society and jeopardize the future of the entire nation.

The plight of Syrian children turned refugees as the result of the conflict is also very telling about the serious consequences of the military option that some have been promoting and seem to continue to believe in. Brazil is acutely aware of the increasing pressure faced by neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees.

Those facts must not be regarded merely as troubling statistics. The emotional impact of the conflict on young Syrians has disturbing after-effects. We cannot simply hope that Syrian children will prove to be as bold, courageous and resilient as Mr. Sawaneh from Sierra Leone. The very touching and troubling reports regarding the suffering of children in Syria must awaken our moral conscience and collective responsibility in order to promote an urgent and peaceful solution to the conflict on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) and the efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi.

Brazil has been contributing to humanitarian initiatives to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people,

including children and Syrian refugees. In response to the call made by High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, Brazil is facilitating entry visas for Syrian nationals seeking asylum in our country.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Afghanistan, in the Central African Republic and in other conflict situations, children continue to bear a heavy burden. Abuses against children are perpetrated, moreover, even in situations on the Council's agenda that are not currently of open conflict. A report issued by Amnesty International last week underscores the dire scenario faced by Palestinian children under occupation in the West Bank. We call on Israeli forces to abide by their obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law, with special attention to the situation of Palestinian children. Reports of harassment and intimidation are particularly distressing and impact negatively on the perspectives for peaceful and harmonious coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians in future. Such abuses must cease forthwith if the two sides are to build an environment conducive to peace and stability, as supported by the international community.

In order for crimes against children in situations of conflict to be eradicated, perpetrators must be brought to justice. International efforts to ensure that accountability is upheld have been greatly enhanced by the role of the International Criminal Court in prosecuting individuals accused of violations against children and by its deterrent effect. Peacekeeping missions may also have a role to play — as long as they have the adequate capabilities to perform their protection tasks — both through the protection of civilians in immediate danger and through the work of child protection advisers.

As in many other situations, in the case of children and armed conflict the Security Council should also pay greater attention to the benefits of prevention. The promotion of sustainable development, with social inclusion and food and nutritional security, can certainly contribute to conflict prevention, and therefore to avoid bringing conflict to the doorsteps of millions of children. An improvement in living conditions and, as a consequence, the establishment of a safe environment for children and youth to pursue their educational and cultural development, are vital factors to avoid the recruitment of children by armed groups.

In conclusion, let me once more underscore Brazil's firm commitment to the protection of children in situations of conflict. When serving as a member of the Security Council, Brazil worked actively for the adoption of resolutions addressing this critical issue, resolutions such as 1612 (2005) and 1998 (2011). We will continue to enhance our cooperation with the United Nations system and to make use of our bilateral channels to ensure due attention is given to halting violence against the most vulnerable. Brazil joins the Security Council's efforts to break the cycle of violence and to spare children the direst consequences of adults' wars.