

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

*Statement by Mr. Drobniak, Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations*

At the outset, I would like to highly commend the Luxembourg presidency for convening this important meeting. There can hardly be a topic that calls for greater attention than this one. Our sincere appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their valuable briefings. Special gratitude goes to Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh for his personal testimony.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

The reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict are a stark reminder for us of the challenges ahead. We note with appreciation that some progress has been made in the protection and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict, especially with regard to the release of children from armed forces and armed groups in several countries. However, we remain gravely concerned and saddened that children in many countries continue to suffer terribly from the physical and emotional wounds that armed conflicts bring upon them.

Croatia fully supports all efforts aimed at the prevention and combating of sexual violence in conflict and at ensuring accountability for crimes committed. Croatia has become one of the global champions of the United Kingdom's initiative entitled Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and has supported a historic declaration aimed towards worldwide efforts to eradicate that war crime. We look forward to the elaboration of the international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict, which is of special relevance for children's rights and their protection.

Croatia strictly opposes and is gravely concerned by the use of schools for military purposes, because it puts children in grave danger and negatively affects their right to education. That seriously jeopardizes their chances for the future. We recognize the right to access to education as a fundamental human right. Particular attention is being paid to its protection through Croatia's international assistance and development cooperation to countries in and emerging from conflicts.

Last year, following a children-sensitive approach and supporting girls' education in particular, Croatia funded the construction of a library in Afghanistan used by 5,000 children, and a high school attended by 600 children. Last year we also provided medical treatment in Croatia to a number of Palestinian children suffering from respiratory diseases, thereby contributing to their psychosocial rehabilitation and well-being.

As a country that experienced war horrors that gravely affected children, Croatia fully supports the campaign "Children, not soldiers", which has as its primary aim preventing the recruitment of children by 2016.

The use of child soldiers and their conscription and enlistment into armed units is a war crime. There can be zero tolerance for impunity. This and all other forms of war crimes and crimes against humanity must be prosecuted and brought to justice, primarily before national courts but ultimately, in the absence of capacity of States to do so, before the International Criminal Court (ICC). With the aim of strengthening this important principle of subsidiarity, Croatia fully supports deepening the dialogue

between the Security Council and the ICC.

We must all increase the pressure on those who have no heart, no shame and no conscience. Listing violations against children as clear designation criteria for sanctions, and making concerted efforts to sanction responsible individuals is one way to do so.

We should spare no effort to protect those who are the most vulnerable and those unable to protect themselves. Croatia firmly supports the inclusion of child protection advisers in peacekeeping operations and the organization of predeployment targeted training for child protection for peacekeepers. It is of paramount importance that all the relevant peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations properly address the impact of conflict on children, especially girls. We also advocate that this aspect be given even greater prominence in the relevant reports submitted to the Security Council.

Croatia ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and calls for its universal ratification. We also consider the Paris Principles and Commitments a useful guide in our common efforts to respond to the plight of children affected by armed conflicts worldwide.

Finally, as one of the sponsors of today's resolution (resolution 2143 (2014)), we highly commend its unanimous adoption.