

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

*Statement by Ms. Flores, Permanent Mission of Honduras to the United Nations*

We are pleased to address the Security Council as part of the open debate under the Luxembourg's outstanding presidency, with a view to contributing constructively to the consideration and discussion of a topic of such importance that touches such a sensitive chord at the Organization: the situation of children in armed conflicts.

While the exploitation of any human being is reprehensible, it is all the more so when children are involved. The use of minors in conflicts by armed organized groups violates ethical standards and international legal principles. Besides being a merciless practice, it is an unforgivable violation of human rights. Innumerable defenceless innocents should not be used as human shields. It is inconceivable that they should be forced to place or deactivate mines, thereby endangering their precious lives. That makes it imperative that States today take a greater responsibility to support the efforts, processes and mechanisms at the United Nations to prevent the recruitment and participation of girls and boys in armed conflict and to ensure that they are protected from hostilities.

We are not unaware of the fact that progress has been made over the past two decades. In 1993 the General Assembly called on the Secretary-General to deal with the issue, commissioning Graça Machel to conduct a study of the impact of armed conflict on children. The recommendations of her report (A/51/306) led to major initiatives such as the creation of the position of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the rights and protection of children trapped in armed conflicts, who has done major work in recent years and today has undertaken a campaign, together with the UNICEF, to put an end by 2016 to the recruitment and use of children by the security forces of Governments in such situations.

Nevertheless, as has been noted, the greatest responsibility for abuse and violations included in the lists of the Secretary-General falls on non-State armed actors. The recommendation recently made to the Office of the Special Representative to promote the approval and application of action plans against such agents is appropriate, as well as is identifying how to hold accountable those who commit crimes against children.

It is commendable that, since 1998, the Security Council held debates and adopted resolutions contributing to the current monitoring and detailed reports by countries and promoting diplomatic initiatives and humanitarian initiatives intended to put an end to the barbarous infraction of using children as hostages in armed conflicts. The Council has also aimed at strengthening the agenda in all member countries by strengthening national legal capacity, measures to prevent recruitment and programmes of rehabilitation and reintegration into civil society. Indispensable in that regard is the assistance of regional organizations and the support of donors to implement action plans and provide all the information needed for the general public. But that is not enough.

Central America has not been removed from the scourge of armed conflicts that affected the region in the 1980s. Since then there has been modest progress to reach peace and security through democracy and social investment for development. Even though these are major achievements, they are not enough to respond to the new challenges we face. It is inevitable that nations with limited resources and so many needs in precarious situations find children to be the first victims of imbalance. That is not just a problem of the lack of security but also of seeking the social and economic causes of this insecurity

aggravated by the vulnerability of a territory that is easily used as a bridge for the trafficking of illegal substances and of people where the arsenal of clandestine weapons conspires against peace. That is a cocktail of precarious circumstances that leads to explosive results. The violence drags in many minors, who are subject to all kinds of abuse.

While those situations do not fit into the specific cases of armed conflict and do not figure on the lists of the Secretary-General submitted to the Council, we believe that they are both tragic and pertinent. This phenomenon should be studied in depth as a priority. To that end, we respectfully call with great energy for the Organization to provide the attention needed. In the same way that it responded to the problem of child soldiers, it should find the initiatives, mechanisms and recommendations needed to protect the young people in our region who are trapped in equally disquieting conflicts. Each of their stories is a moving one; their repercussions and the ability to contain them goes beyond our domestic capacity, while the terror they entail goes beyond our national borders. Together they threaten international peace and security.

My country is making herculean efforts to defend itself against the growing infrastructure of organized crime and criminal groups. We have begun to reverse that pernicious trend — more through our own efforts than as a result of assistance — but the levels of insecurity continue to be unacceptable. The roiling violence drags in hundreds of girls and boys, either as victims or as bullies. It does not matter what terminology we use. Quite simply, they are victims. Any expectation for the future of the country is unfortunately being lost.

In terms of the number of lives being turned upside down there are less damaging wars, as compared to the violence that is eating away at our societies. The harm of this scourge is not measured necessarily by the drugs distributed in the markets but, rather, by the horror and pain caused by so much death. The unrestricted use of children recruited by gangs to serve as “mules” in criminal activities such as extortion is an abominable practice that, in the worst of cases, turns children into hired killers. Beyond family disintegration and economic exclusion, which makes them easy prey for organized crime, is the impossibility of escaping from it once they are identified or recruited.

In those circumstances, my delegation believes that the situation of young people and children subjected to social environments of violence, insecurity and extreme vulnerability should be studied in a broader framework including not just child soldiers or those enmeshed in conflicts but by adding another dimension to the worldwide effort to protect children and give them the security and opportunities they deserve.

This is nothing more than a respectful call to the Security Council and the international community to take the steps that conscience dictates. There is no doubt that we can draw closer to the peace we long for if work together for a global society that is increasingly more fair and equitable.