

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

Statement by Mr. Bishnoi, Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations

We thank you, Mr. President, for providing this opportunity to Member States to share their views on this important subject. We also thank your delegation for the very useful concept note (S/2014/144, annex).

In one of the many religions that we have in India, God himself is depicted as a child. The child is indeed divine. Notwithstanding that divinity, child soldiers have been used in wars since time immemorial. In contemporary times, it was drummer boys who led Napoleon's initial attack in the battle of Waterloo on 18 June 1815, only to be shredded to pieces by gunfire from the other side. Large numbers of women and children were also wilfully killed in concentration camps and by indiscriminate air raids in the Second World War.

We have heard from Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh of Sierra Leone today. There was a battle associated with the United Nations peacekeeping force in that country. On 10 September 2000, the British special forces launched Operation Barras to rescue British soldiers who had been captured by the West Side Boys. While the operation was successful, it led to casualties.

Looking at the theatre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today, we find an extensive use of child soldiers by various armed groups. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has itself noted with concern allegations that 30 to 40 per cent of the Nduma Defence of Congo elements may be below 18 years of age. Despite this evidence, the Security Council has authorized the creation of an Intervention Brigade to carry out targeted offensive operations. The rules of engagement are, however, silent on engagement with child soldiers. The traumatizing nature of such engagement will also have to be considered.

We share the view contained in the concept note that those who exploit children should be held accountable. We also agree that the most effective way of doing so is through capacity-building for Member States. Action for that should originate from the issue's consideration by the General Assembly and Peacebuilding Commission. National efforts on the ground should be supported by political missions. Civilian protection advisers embedded in peacekeeping missions would themselves only be able to perform a limited role.

The political will to address the problem needs to go beyond the theatre of war. We need to address the economic and social marginalization of the poorest nations, which is driving hundreds of millions into the kind of childhood that could well make them part of tomorrow's problem rather than tomorrow's solutions. It is that understanding that explains the importance that our delegation attaches to an ambitious post- 2015 development agenda that has built-in means of implementation and the required enabling environment for its achievement.

