

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

*Statement by Mr. Asselborn, Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations*

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Luxembourg.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh for their briefings and testimony.

What makes the suffering of a child revolting, Albert Camus wrote, is the fact that the suffering is not justified. The suffering is all the more revolting and the less justified when it does not result from the misfortunes of human life but from the hatred of humankind. Each of us instinctively feels that every child maimed or wounded by war wounds our own innocence and shakes our faith in humankind. That is why the international community now unanimously shares the conviction that children deserve to be protected from the impact of conflict. Yet instances of violations against children are unfortunately far too numerous and revolting.

When the Security Council turned its attention to the issue of children in armed conflict 15 years ago, all attention was focused on what was then commonly called “child soldiers”, an ambiguous and simplistic term. Today, the campaign launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in cooperation with UNICEF and other United Nations partners, reminds us, by the simplicity of its title — “Children, not soldiers” — that children are not meant to be soldiers, even if an assault rifle is placed in their hands. I very much hope that the campaign, which was officially launched yesterday at United Nations Headquarters, will be supported by all Member States. Only a true collective commitment will make Governments’ recruitment of children and their use on the battlefield become part of history.

But Governments are not the only ones recruiting children to bolster their armed forces. The vast majority of the parties listed in the annexes of the reports of the Secretary-General are non-State armed groups, like the rebels who abducted Alhaji Babah Sawaneh and forced him to fight in Sierra Leone. It is therefore important that the international community does not lose sight of the abuses committed by such armed groups against children and tackles them with equal determination.

Recruitment is not the only danger to which children are exposed. Violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict can take many forms. But whether they become victims of bombings or crossfire, are subjected to sexual violence or are recruited to serve in the ranks of armed forces or groups as combatants, or are held as sex slaves, each fate tells the story of a life shattered.

In the Syrian refugee camps in Turkey, I met the haggard look of orphans — it was a blank stare, hinting at all of the horrors they had seen. The Syrian conflict has forced close to 2.5 million people, half of whom are children, to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. More than 10,000 children have died; more than 10,000 lives have been crushed by the Syrian conflict without any chance of flourishing. And how many hundreds of thousands more children will be affected, until the end of their days, by wounds to

their hearts and bodies, as well as their souls, that were inflicted by the conflict — the wounds of those who witnessed unspeakable atrocities, were tortured by Government forces or were forced to fight in armed groups.

Given the urgency of the humanitarian situation, one is tempted to diminish the importance of children's rights such as the right to education or the right to health. That would be a mistake. Thousands of schools are closed, as they are being used for military purposes. With nearly 3,000 schools damaged and school attendance in a downward spiral, an entire generation of Syrians risks illiteracy, seriously jeopardizing chances of the country's socioeconomic recovery.

Hospitals and other health facilities have been targeted and the medical staff threatened and decimated. Currently, it is estimated that 60 per cent of all public hospitals have been affected by the conflict, with almost 40 per cent of them out of service. Childhood diseases that were thought to be eradicated, like poliomyelitis, have reappeared and pose a danger to public health.

Attacks against schools and hospitals, as well as the denial of humanitarian access, are among the six grave violations subject to systematic monitoring by the Security Council through its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which Luxembourg is honoured to chair. All violations against children deserve to be condemned with the same conviction.

The perpetrators of atrocities against children must answer for their actions. There can be no impunity for those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The International Criminal Court plays an important role in that respect, as shown in the cases of *Thomas Lubanga*, *Germain Katanga* and *Bosco Ntaganda*.

I cited the Syrian example but other situations also deserve our full attention. Violence in the Central African Republic has reached unprecedented levels of cruelty and brutality in recent months. Children have paid a very heavy price. Some have been decapitated, intentionally mutilated or wounded in crossfire. The number of children recruited has almost doubled since the upsurge in violence of 2013, thus obliterating the earlier progress made in demobilizing and reintegrating children.

It is estimated that 6,000 children are currently serving as soldiers in the Central African Republic. The Lord's Resistance Army, the most notable armed group in terms of child recruitment and barbaric war tactics, remains active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic. And its leader, Joseph Kony, remains free.

Strengthened efforts are necessary to fully implement the children and armed conflict agenda. We must build upon the shared conviction that children should not be recruited as soldiers, or killed or maimed, or sexually abused or abducted. Their right to humanitarian assistance, education and health care must be guaranteed, as our goal will never be truly realized until we have ended all violence against children. All efforts must aim to ensure that their rights are fully respected, in times of war as in times of peace.

Resolution 2143 (2014), just adopted, reflects our shared determination to put an end to the violations

and abuses committed against children in armed conflict. I thank the members of the Council for supporting our initiative as well as the many Member States that demonstrated their commitment by becoming sponsors of the resolution.

Children embody the hope and future of any society. Destroying children destroys such hope. Protecting children will therefore protect the future.