

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

*Statement by Mr. Nikolic, Permanent Mission of Montenegro to the United Nations*

We thank you for organizing this open debate, Madam President, and commend your leadership in preparing the text of the resolution just adopted (resolution 2143 (2014)), which we were happy to sponsor. We also thank today's briefers for their valuable presentations.

Montenegro aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would like, however, to highlight some points of particular importance to my country.

We were moved by the story of Mr. Alhaji Banah Sawaneh, who was a former child soldier in Sierra Leone. His testimony is yet another reminder of the scope of the challenge we face, even today.

Although the Security Council has made significant progress in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda, more action is needed to protect the rights of children in situations of armed conflict and to ensure that perpetrators of grave violations against children are held to account. It is in that context that we welcome and strongly support the campaign "Children, not soldiers", which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF unveiled yesterday as a new effort to end the recruitment and use of children in Government forces in conflict by 2016.

Thousands of boys and girls around the world are still being recruited into Government forces and armed opposition groups to serve as combatants, cooks, porters or messengers, or in other roles. Girls, and sometimes boys, are also recruited for sexual purposes. Therefore, we fully echo the words of the Special Representative that the time has come for the world to unite and turn the page, once and for all, on the recruitment and use of children by security forces in conflict.

We expect that the campaign will make a significant difference through its twofold contribution: first, to the full implementation of action plans to end and prevent recruitment and, secondly, to the release of children and their reintegration into civilian life in order to ensure that children released from armed forces or groups are able to become productive members of their societies and are no longer at risk of re-recruitment in future.

It is also essential that the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict continue to best use the tools at its disposal in order to provide appropriate responses to all types of grave violations, including those committed by non-State actors. In that regard, we would like to stress that Member States need to allow access for the United Nations to armed non-State actors for the purpose of ending violations and concluding and implementing action plans.

We share the concern about attacks and the increasing use of schools for military purposes, as it can have a devastating impact on children. It is worrisome that schools can be converted into military targets and that students, teachers and learning facilities can indeed be made vulnerable to attacks and other forms of violence by parties in conflict. We call on all parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education. We also have to ensure that all measures are taken to protect students, teachers, schools and universities from attack and military use.

With respect to United Nations peacekeeping and political missions and the indispensable role they play,

Montenegro would like to advocate for a strong child protection component to be incorporated in missions' mandates. That would require peacekeepers, military and security personnel to receive specialized child protection predeployment training.

Montenegro is concerned about the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. We would like to call on all parties to conflicts to refrain from the use of such explosive weapons so as to ensure that civilians, in particular children, are protected against death, injury and psychological harm.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has a key role in fighting impunity. When crimes of an international scale are committed and national judiciaries are unwilling or unable to deal with them, States parties to the Rome Statute should pay due consideration to referring those situations to the ICC. It is also vital that the Security Council, to the extent possible, use the option to refer situations to the ICC.

In conclusion, let me point out that everyone — the international community, regional and subregional organizations and the entire United Nations system — must contribute to our common and noble objective so that no child ever experiences what Mr. Alhaji Babah Sawaneh went through. We owe that to children.