

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

*Statement by Ms. Vonta, Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations*

I would like to thank the Luxembourg presidency for convening this important open debate. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Ms. Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Mr. Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Mr. Sawaneh for their comprehensive briefings.

Let me align our statement with the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and the representative of the Human Security Network.

My country welcomes the recent developments in the Security Council discussions on children and armed conflict, such as the focus on sexual violence, in particular on justice and accountability, the increased attention to the issues of child protection when setting up or renewing United Nations mission mandates and the attention of children in fast-changing situations on the Security Council agenda. We also welcome the regular briefings by Special Representative Zerrougui to the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as other activities for the greater accountability. We would encourage all actors to continue with those efforts and to enhance the efficiency of the tools at their disposal.

We are deeply concerned that, although much has been done since 1996, when the Machel report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306) shocked the international community, children still suffer in situations of armed conflict, such as in Syria and the Central African Republic, as well as in too many other places.

Slovenia remains concerned over the fact that more than half of the parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict are persistent perpetrators. The Security Council needs to address that issue urgently by imposing targeted measures and by considering ways to increase pressure on such persistent perpetrators in the Working Group.

We also believe that there is an urgent need to identify ways to approach non-State armed groups and to conclude action plans with them, since the vast majority of the parties listed in the annexes to the annual report are armed groups. An important role is played by the authorities in the countries concerned that should allow unconditional access of the United Nations to those armed groups.

As a strong believer in the power of education, Slovenia remains greatly concerned over the increasing reports of attacks on schools and about the military use of schools. Attacks on schools and the military use of schools put children and teachers at risk while denying children their right to education. We welcome the drafting of the Lucens guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict and support their finalization, which should be followed by broad endorsement by States.

My country also strongly believes in the importance of accountability and the fight against impunity. The primary responsibility for the prosecution of conflict-related crimes, including violations committed against children, lies with States. Greater effort is therefore needed to improve criminal justice at national levels. Among other actions, we need to strengthen the international legal framework for judicial assistance, including extradition, between States in order to support effective prosecution of

international crimes at a national level. Having recognized that legal gap, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Belgium and Argentina are working together on the initiative to consider the possibility of adopting a new international instrument on mutual legal assistance and extradition for the effective investigation and prosecution of the most serious crimes of international concern by domestic jurisdictions. We intend to continue with activities in that respect in the framework of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and we invite other States to join the initiative.

The international community has been working on the issue of child soldiers for a long time, yet children are still recruited and used by parties to conflict. In that regard, my country welcomes the campaign “Children, not soldiers”, launched yesterday not far from here. Its goal, to prevent and eliminate child recruitment by national security forces by 2016, should not be missed.

Let me conclude by stressing the need for preventive measures in order to achieve our common goal. We recognize birth registration as one of the most important measures. In December 2013, a professional training programme was carried out on a system of civil status and migration for Afghanistan, co-financed by Slovenia. That programme included training on civil registration. The main goal of that development assistance programme was to present and share Slovenia’s experience in that field.

Finally, I welcome the adoption of resolution 2143 (2014), on children and armed conflict, and its aim to reinforce the implementation of the normative framework that has been gradually developed in the Security Council since the adoption of the first resolution on this topic 15 years ago.