

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

Statement by Mr. Nduhuura, Permanent Mission of Uganda to the United Nations

Let me begin by congratulating you, Madam President, and the delegation of Luxembourg on your leadership of the Security Council this month and on organizing this debate on the important issue of children and armed conflict.

I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; Executive Director of UNICEF Anthony Lake; and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous for their useful briefings. We also appreciate the insights provided by Alhaji Babah Sawaneh, from Sierra Leone, based on his own experience as a child soldier.

We often say that children are the future of the world, and indeed they are because they represent humankind's hopes. As the most vulnerable group, children are adversely affected by armed conflict. It is therefore incumbent upon all Member States and parties to conflicts to ensure that children are protected from the harm of armed conflict.

Uganda condemns the recruitment, use and abuse of children in armed conflict in violation of applicable international law. The psychosocial consequences on the well-being and mental health of the affected children are traumatic. We therefore welcome the attention that Security Council continues to accord to this issue and the progress that is being made, including the adoption of a series of measures to promote the protection of children in armed conflict by the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to be done, especially in assisting countries emerging from conflict to give full consideration to the special needs of children as part of their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.

The challenge of protecting the rights and well-being of children during conflict and ensuring attention to their educational, health, rehabilitation and nutritional needs in post-conflict periods is daunting. Too frequently, the absence of participation by advocates of youths and children during peace negotiations means that their concerns are often not given the attention they deserve.

We are convinced that addressing the needs of children is not just a matter of fairness, equity or humanitarianism; it is also key to building and maintaining lasting peace. It is therefore crucial to ensure respect for children's rights, hold accountable those responsible for abuses and crimes committed against children in armed conflict, and cater to the needs of affected children in post-conflict situations.

Beyond the impact on peace and stability, there is indeed the human dimension of the tragedy of children caught up in armed conflict. Unfortunately, there have been many instances of violent conflict where children have been used as bearers, cooks, messengers and sex slaves, and others have been involved in combat, taking human lives. Besides child soldiers, all children become victims in one way or another during armed conflicts. They become victims when they are displaced or when their Government cannot ensure adequate funding for schools and health clinics, resulting in very low school participation rates and high infant mortality rates.

No country emerging from war can, without risk, leave its young people on the sidelines without any future, knowing only a culture of violence. Programmes for disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating combatants must therefore take into account the specific needs of children, in particular young girls, who

are even more severely affected than boys and whose reintegration is even more difficult. In Uganda, following the end of the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency in 2006, one of the priorities of the Government was reintegration of formerly abducted children into their families and communities.

In conclusion, it is vital that we constantly improve strategies to make an impact in terms of protection of children in armed conflict. The international community must make sustained efforts to truly change the situation. The United Nations should continue to document its experience and lessons learned in the area of protection of children during peacekeeping operations so that future peacekeeping operations can benefit from that experience.

At the same time, all parties to armed conflicts should strive to meet their obligations under relevant international law and to respect and safeguard the rights of children. In post-conflict situations, the return of children to their families, schools and communities as well as the provision of sufficient resources should be prioritized. Young boys and girls kidnapped or coerced into joining armed groups must be freed to live the rest of their lives without the stigma or trauma of those early years shadowing their future.