

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

Statement by Mr. Koncke, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations

I would like to express Uruguay's gratitude to the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict during its presidency of the Security Council. I am also grateful for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and reiterate our full support to her in fulfilling her mandate. We would also like to thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, whose joint work with Ms. Zerrougui is of the greatest significance in achieving the goal of stopping child recruitment by security forces and armed groups by 2016.

Allow me to highlight the value of the substantive reports prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, which allow us to appreciate the achievements made and challenges to be addressed in order to overcome the serious problems that this sensitive issue presents for the international community. We also thank Alhaji Babah Sawaneh for his courageous first-hand testimony.

The impact of armed conflict on children is alarming and horrifying, as is the recognition of the increase in serious violations of the rights of children despite the many efforts being made to limit and ultimately put an end to such acts. We therefore call on the Security Council to adopt specific measures to strengthen the children and armed conflict mandate.

An alarming and growing number of children are being killed, subjected to sexual violence and rape, and recruited into armies and armed groups. In addition, unacceptable attacks on schools and their deliberate use for military purposes endanger children's lives and security, as well as their right to education. The task before us of preventing such violations and abuses of children's rights and establishing effective protection for children from the atrocities of war is an arduous one, especially as most children involved in armed conflict are being recruited by States themselves.

The subject we are considering today is an item on the agenda of the General Assembly, where every year my country plays as active a role as possible to increase the share of responsibility shouldered by that United Nations organ, which is of universal membership, on a subject that is part of its mandate and of grave concern to all of us.

Nevertheless, Uruguay should like to highlight the role the Security Council has been playing through the adoption of its many resolutions aimed at establishing and implementing specific measures to end the illegal recruitment and exploitation of children in armed conflict. We reiterate our gratitude in this regard, in the understanding that the Council's intervention is of vital importance to achieving the objective of stopping such recruitment by 2016 and preventing further violations of the fundamental rights of children. Thanks to the action plans resulting from the Council's mandate on this subject, over the past 20 years thousands of children have been freed from a form of exploitation that is a violation of human dignity.

Resolution 2143 (2014), adopted by the Security Council today, on the rights of the child is of special importance. In particular, the Council reiterates its deep concern over the lack of progress in situations of armed conflict and the fact that, in such conflicts, parties continue to violate with impunity the provisions of international law that protect children by condemning their recruitment by armies and armed groups. The Council has stressed that concern in the resolution by calling on the parties involved

in armed conflict and armed groups to respect the norms of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their additional protocols, and to refrain from the use of schools for military purposes. Uruguay believes that this is essential when it comes to respecting the rights of the child, as established in various instruments, in particular article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges States to respect children's right to education.

We should also recognize the contribution made by the International Criminal Court in various situations, in particular by designating as war crimes acts that involve sexual violence against children, the recruitment of children under 15 years of age, or their use as active participants in armed conflicts. We also recognize the work of other international courts that have also taken on the issue of the protection of children in their jurisdictions. We appreciate the fact that the resolution expressly recognizes the work of the International Criminal Court and calls on all States to put an end to impunity for cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other abhorrent crimes against children.

Our delegation affirms Uruguay's belief in the fundamental need to strengthen the fight against impunity for all of those responsible for grave violations of children's rights. We therefore encourage the Security Council to report such cases to the International Criminal Court. We also believe that cooperation with national and international courts is a necessary and fundamental step in ensuring effective judgments in such situations.

Another relevant issue is the attention to be accorded to the effective reintegration of children who are linked to armed groups and those who have suffered other severe violations of human rights, in particular in cases involving sexual exploitation or abuse. I stress the crucial importance of effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes to the well-being of all children affected by armed conflict. Such programmes should necessarily enjoy the human and financial resources they require and the support of the communities to which they belong in order to ensure the successful and sustainable reintegration of those children into society.

To conclude, my delegation believes that the social reintegration of children implicitly involves recognizing situations in which children are accused of crimes committed during their association with armed forces or groups. In such situations, children need to be considered first and foremost as victims, and as such treated in accordance with international law within the context of a legal system that enables their full social rehabilitation.