

Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict 19th of September 2012,
Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. DeLaurentis, Permanent Mission of The United States of America to the United Nations

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous, Executive Director Lake and Mr. Tolbert, President of the International Center for Transitional Justice, for their briefings. Before I begin I would also like to thank former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Radhika Coomaraswamy for her six years of dedicated service and enormous contributions, and to welcome Special Representative Zerrougui to that very important and demanding position. The United States very much looks forward to working with her.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2012/261) notes some encouraging developments. In 2011 the Special Representative of the Secretary-General signed three action plans, with the Government of Chad and two armed groups in the Central African Republic. Thus far in 2012, the United Nations has signed four action plans, with South Sudan and Burma and two with Somalia. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has submitted a draft action plan on child soldiering, which is being reviewed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's office. Such action plans are a proven tool for promoting child protection and rehabilitation.

There were other signs of progress as well. The Maoist party in Nepal was delisted from the Secretary-General's report after it ended the recruitment and use of child soldiers and completed its action plan commitments to suspend payments, cease providing housing and encourage disqualified minors to register for reintegration programmes. The delisting of the Iniya Bharati faction was a major step in resolving the last elements of child soldiering in Sri Lanka, although more remains to be done.

Discussions on action plans with armed groups also made progress. In Afghanistan the Ministries of Interior and Defence undertook initiatives to prevent the recruitment and exploitation of children. Those are real and tangible results, and we commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's Office for its success in significantly improving the situation of children in such countries.

Still, much of the Secretary-General's report documents many ongoing instances of appalling abuses against children. The Lord's Resistance Army, for example, continued its barbaric operations in several African countries, abducting 101 children in the Central African Republic and carrying out 211 attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Many of those attacks used child soldiers, and they resulted in the abduction of 124 children in a portion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Orientale Province alone. The report documents almost 1,000 cases of child recruitment in Somalia, mainly by Al-Shabaab, and notes the registration of 7,800 child casualties of conflict in the three main hospitals in Mogadishu. The carnage committed by Al-Assad and the clique around him is particularly distressing. As the report states,

"Children as young as 9 years of age were victims of killing and maiming, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence, and use as human shields. Schools have been regularly raided and used as military bases and detention centres." (S/2012/261, para. 19)

Such atrocities, including the torture of young children, continue with alarming frequency and serve as further evidence that the Council should do more to support humanitarian assistance and political transition in Syria.

As we look to the future of the process we should reflect on what more we can do to better protect children in areas of armed conflict. We agree with the Secretary-General that we must find a better way to affect the conduct of persistent perpetrators. Since most Government forces have signed action plans or given indications that they will do so, our main concern should be with non-State armed groups. In addressing such armed groups, we must consider two issues. First, because national Governments have the primary responsibility to protect children in their territory, the United Nations must work with armed groups only in close cooperation with national authorities. Resolution 2068 (2012), which we adopted a few minutes ago, correctly reaffirms that position, which the Council emphasized last year in resolution 1998 (2011).

Secondly, the United States strongly believes that the Security Council should consider a broader range of options to increase pressure on persistent perpetrators of violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict. At this time, a free-standing sanctions regime on children in armed conflict would not seem to address the need for better tools to deal with persistent perpetrators. As the Secretary-General documents in his report (S/2012/261), four country-specific sanctions committees with designation criteria on violations and abuses against children already exist.

However we encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to provide a report to the working group evaluating the range of possibilities in this area, with a view to facilitating a report by the group to the Council. A thoughtful analysis of different proposals on how to promote accountability would help bring an end to the cycle of violence that plagues children living in conflict-affected areas where persistent perpetrators operate.

Our work today to remove children from the scourge of armed conflict has seen great progress, through the implementation of action plans and focused work to educate armed groups. But we must still summon the resolve to hold accountable the most recalcitrant perpetrators, and redouble our commitment to end impunity.