

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

Statement by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to the United Nations

(spoke in French): It is an honour for me to address the Security Council for the first time in my capacity as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Members may rest assured that I appreciate the responsibility entrusted to me and the challenges that await us. In that regard, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, for her exemplary work during the past six years and for the progress achieved made under her guidance.

I would also like to thank Germany for convening this open debate. The efforts of the German chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict over the past two years made it possible to preserve a cooperative and open spirit. In that regard, I welcome the personnel commitment and the resolve of Ambassador Wittig and his team.

(spoke in English): Before the Council is the eleventh report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2012/261). Since the last debate (see S/PV.6589), there has been tremendous progress — more than we have seen in previous years. However, violations continue to be committed against children, the number of persistent perpetrators has increased, and many new challenges have arisen.

With regard to dialogue with parties to conflict, we have seen a number of positive developments. Indeed, eight years after the Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 1539 (2004), action plans have generally been accepted by listed State and non-State parties as a unique tool that can successfully lead to de-listing. In 2011 alone, two parties — the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist in Nepal and the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal in Sri Lanka — were removed from the annexes after having successfully implemented all concrete and time-bound activities spelled out in their action plans. That brings the total number of de-listed parties to nine.

However, it is not just about adding or removing a party from a list. It is about children, first and foremost about releasing children. Since the framework was put in place, tens of thousands of children have been separated from armed forces and groups and reintegrated into their communities. Indeed, actions plans are not only a process. They are a unique tool, mandated by the Council, to bring parties into compliance and to stop violations against children.

In 2011, action plans were signed in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and Chad and, this year, in South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia, where the Transitional Federal Government signed the first action plan on killing and maiming of children in August. To date, 20 action plans have been completed or are in the process of being implemented. It is especially heartening to note that practically all Government forces listed for the recruitment and use of children have now either signed an action plan or are negotiating one.

I am also happy to report to the Council today that the action plan with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has almost been finalized and is expected to be signed in the coming weeks. That

action plan will include activities to end the recruitment and use of children by the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, in accordance with resolution 1882 (2009), measures to prevent and halt sexual violence against children.

The continued mainstreaming of the children and armed conflict agenda into the United Nations is central to my Office's work. We are currently supporting the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs in their efforts to update the child protection policy for United Nations field missions. That effort is essential. I would like to emphasize that maintaining sufficient and dedicated child protection capacities in peacekeeping and special political missions is key to the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as the successful conduct of dialogue with parties to conflict.

We also continue to work hand in hand with UNICEF to enhance child protection capacities in conflict-affected areas. Beyond our traditional colleagues, new partners are also joining our efforts, especially since the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011). My Office is currently working with UNESCO and has approached the World Health Organization to enhance our monitoring of attacks against schools and hospitals. We are also increasing our links with the International Labour Organization, especially in relation to the economic reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups. In addition, we continue to enhance our cooperation with partners on sexual violence against children to further our implementation of resolution 1882 (2009). In that regard, I look forward to working closely with Under-Secretary-General Bachelet and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura.

My Office has also been working to develop and strengthen partnerships with regional political and military organizations including the European Union, the African Union and NATO. That has proven useful, in particular in the areas of training, awareness-raising and the conduct of military operations. With that experience in mind, I will now look into working more closely with the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Though much positive progress has been achieved, our work is hardly accomplished. In this year's report, 52 armed forces and groups are listed in the annexes. Forty-two of those are non-State armed groups and 10 are Government forces. At the request of the Council and as a follow-up to resolution 1998 (2011), the Secretary-General has listed for the first time five parties to conflict responsible for attacks on schools and hospitals.

Of the 52 parties listed, 32 persistent perpetrators have been listed for five years or more. The majority are non-State actors operating in situations where Governments may have the willingness, but not always the capacities to take measures. That is where the Council can play a critical role.

The cost of inaction has become too high. It is time to show the Council's determination to act. In follow-up to resolution 1998 (2011), my predecessor requested Ambassador De La Sablière, former French Permanent Representative to the United Nations, to prepare a comprehensive report on the way forward. The paper proposes a menu of options that could be considered by the Council against those persistent perpetrators. Those include increased tailored political engagement of the Council, strengthened accountability measures and targeted measures, where necessary. That could be done in an incremental manner, starting with those individuals in situations for which a sanctions committee is already in place. It would send a strong signal that the resolutions of the Council are not

only words on paper and that vigorous action can be taken when they are not implemented.

Last year, we witnessed a tremendous change in the international environment. That created new opportunities but also new challenges for the United Nations and for this agenda in particular. The situations in Libya, Syria and Mali, for example, pose new threats for children that the Council, along with my Office and its partners, must address.

The situation of children in Syria is dire. My staff and other United Nations colleagues have documented Government attacks on school, children being denied access to hospitals, girls and boys suffering and dying in bombardments of their neighbourhoods and also being subject to torture, including sexual violence, sometimes for weeks. Since the publication of the report before the Council, my Office has also gathered evidence on violations committed by non-State armed groups in Syria. We have received information concerning indiscriminate bomb attacks that have killed children in Damascus and other areas, and continue to document incidents committed by armed actors, such as the Free Syrian Army, who may have children associated with their forces.

I have met with the Syrian Permanent Representative with regard to our concerns. I have ensured the Ambassador that I am ready to establish an open dialogue with the Syrian authorities as a sign of good faith towards their moral and legal obligations. In that regard, I have also asked the Ambassador to transmit my call to the Syrian armed forces to evacuate schools as a matter of utmost priority.

In Libya, the localized violence and continued presence of so-called armed brigades threaten the lives of children, long after the generalized violence of 2011 came to an end. It remains of concern that incidents of the association of children with armed groups are still being reported. My Office has been in close contact with the Libyan Mission in New York to strategize about how best to address the remaining threats to children in the Libyan context.

Since its inception in March 2012, the crisis in Mali has been characterized by grave violations against children. Hundreds of cases of recruitment and use of children by the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), as well as by Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, have been reported. Particularly alarming are recent reports of new training camps in northern Mali, run by armed groups. Sexual violence against children, especially by the MNLA, is also of great concern.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the resurgence of violence in the east has once again taken a heavy toll on children. The March 23 Movement (M-23), an armed group established by former members of the Congrès national pour la défense du peuple, has been responsible for intensive child recruitment campaigns since April this year; reports of recruitment in Rwanda on behalf of M-23 have also been received. M-23 has killed, maimed and injured scores of children, and sexual violence against girls has been reported. I am disturbed by the fact that M-23 perpetrators have a long history of violations against civilians, including children. The flagrant impunity in which they operate must be addressed once and for all. Measures must be taken to avoid political legitimacy for M-23 elements responsible for human rights violations.

Furthermore, the conflict along the border of the Sudan and South Sudan has put hundreds of children at risk, including children who are displaced from the Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile regions of the Sudan. In addition, I remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation concerning access

for children in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile.

Accountability is an integral element both to address and to prevent violations against children. Though imperfect, the preventive aspect of accountability is real. It should start with the criminalization of under-age recruitment and the domestication of international norms and standards prohibiting the recruitment and use of children. It must also be accompanied by domestic enforcement through national rule of law institutions. I would like to emphasize again that achieving accountability must be a common effort; while the primary responsibility lies with Governments, donor countries should support and help to strengthen national efforts by providing assistance to capacity-building.

The Lubanga and Taylor judgements have been a watershed in addressing violations against children in conflict in international and hybrid courts, and the possibility of appearing before the International Criminal Court has proven to be an effective deterrent for military commanders and is useful as leverage in dialogue on action plans. Prosecutions for the recruitment of children have also been undertaken in Myanmar and Colombia with positive effect.

However, the international community must give much greater support and attention to local and regional accountability mechanisms to strengthen institutional capacity for the long term. There is a need to further examine best practices in this regard and obtain institutional and financial support for these initiatives. Only with local and regional buy-in can we truly say that we have addressed these issues in a durable way.

As the Council knows, I served for four years as the Deputy Special Representative for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would like to share with the Council that children and their families have high expectations of the Council. Victims feel that it can and should alleviate their suffering. I have seen what the Council in action can do. It can change the fate of a child. Many challenges remain, but Governments and non-State actors have begun to respond to the Council's call for action.

I believe that the protection of all children from grave violations is within our reach. If we stand firm and united, we can move forward and deliver on what is expected from us, namely, that the international community come together and demonstrate its determination to protect children from war. I would like to assure all of my partners, including all Member States, that I am willing to work closely, to listen and to act together in this endeavour.