

Special Representative, Briefing Security Council, Recounts 'Unprecedented Threats' to Children in Mali, Syria Conflicts

 press.un.org/en/2013/sc11035.doc.htm

Special Representative, Briefing Security Council, Recounts 'Unprecedented

Threats' to Children in Mali, Syria Conflicts

The Security Council today, condemning all human rights violations against children in situations of armed conflict, and demanding that all relevant parties immediately stop such violations, reaffirmed its commitment to take targeted steps to deal with persistent perpetrators of those abuses.

Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom), whose delegation holds the Council's rotating presidency for June, read out a statement by the 15-member body expressing strong concern over the high number of repeat offenders that openly disregarded Council resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2068 (2012), and welcomed discussions by its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on options to increase pressure on the perpetrators.

The Council stressed Governments' primary role in protecting children from being recruited and used by parties to armed conflict, as well as from their re-recruitment, killing, maiming, rape and abduction. It equally condemned attacks against schools or hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access by the parties involved.

Further, the statement, underlining the importance of concrete time-bound action plans to prevent and halt such abuses, called parties to armed conflict listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report on the matter to promptly implement such action plans.

Echoing those concerns, Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said that, in Mali, which was included in the Secretary-General's report for the first time, children were being recruited both by armed groups active in the north, and by pro-Government militia. In the Central African Republic, two thirds of children released from armed groups in 2012 had been re-recruited by the Seleka coalition in early 2013. As well, in Syria, children were being killed, detained, tortured and forced to commit atrocities on a mass scale. "If not for these children, then for whom will this Council act?", she asked.

Still, there were signs of progress, she said, noting that, last year, the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan signed action plans with the United Nations to end the recruitment and use of children. In addition, she noted that all armed forces listed in the report's annexes that had recruited and used children had formed an action plan.

Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said that the Secretary-General's report was a stark reminder that the situation remained dire and required the Organization's sustained political and operational engagement. The deployment of Child Protection Advisers in peacekeeping to monitor and report on grave children's rights violations was vital and had fostered attention to child protection at the earliest stages of mission planning, including for the new Mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA.

Gregory Ramm, Associate Vice-President of Save the Children, said that members of his staff had witnessed first hand the devastating impact of the use of explosive devices in armed conflict. He called on States to refrain from their use by revising and strengthening military policies and procedures, supporting the collection and sharing of data with the United Nations, and holding to account those who used such weapons.

Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), expressed deep concern over the use of schools in military operations, which posed grave risks to children and educators. She pointed to steps taken by the Philippine Government and other countries to restrict the use of schools by the armed forces and called on others to follow suit in order to preserve schools as places of learning and safe-havens for children.

Weighing in on the subject, delegates echoed Ms. Brandt's concern of the emerging use of schools, detention of children by security forces and the impact on children of the use of drones in military operations. They stressed the need for Governments to fully implement the relevant action plans to end child recruitment and abuse as a matter of priority, and also called for persistent perpetrators to be investigated and sentenced.

The representative of Syria, however, criticized Ms. Zerrougui for omitting incidents of child recruitment and abuse by Salafists, fundamentalists and Wahhabi armed terrorist groups in her report, while claiming that the Syrian armed forces were responsible for attacking children, schools and hospitals. Similarly, the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo pointed out that Congolese children suffered at the 23 March Movement, Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda and other armed groups, with his counterpart from the Central African Republic stating that members of the Lords Resistance Army continued to attack schools in search of child soldiers and kitchen or sex slaves.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Luxembourg, United States, Azerbaijan, Australia, Russian Federation, France, Guatemala, Togo, Republic of Korea, Morocco, Rwanda, Pakistan, China, United Kingdom (in his national capacity), Thailand, Iraq, India, Colombia, Chad, Canada and Myanmar.

A representative of the European Union delegation also spoke.

The meeting began at 9:34 a.m. and was adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Presidential Statement

The full text of presidential statement S/PRST/2013/8 reads as follows:

“The Security Council takes note with appreciation of the twelfth report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/245) on children and armed conflict and the recommendations contained therein, as well as the positive developments referred to in the report, and notes the continuing challenges in the implementation of its resolutions and presidential statements on children and armed conflict reflected therein.

“The Security Council reiterates its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and, in this connection, its commitment to address the widespread impact of armed conflict on children.

“The Security Council reiterates further its equally strong condemnation of all violations of applicable international law involving the recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict, as well as their re-recruitment, killing and maiming, rape and other sexual violence, abductions, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access by parties to armed conflict. The Council condemns all other violations of international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, committed against children in situations of armed conflict. The Council demands that all relevant parties immediately put an end to such practices and take special measures to protect children.

“The Security Council stresses the primary role of Governments in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict, and reiterates that all actions undertaken by United Nations entities within the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism

must be designed to support and supplement, as appropriate, the protection and rehabilitation roles of national Governments.

“The Security Council notes that reference to a situation in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict is not a legal determination, within the context of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto, and that reference to a non-State party does not affect its legal status.

“The Security Council welcomes the progress made in preventing and responding to violations and abuses committed against children, especially with regard to the increasing number of action plans signed or under negotiation by parties to armed conflict, and the thousands of children that have been demobilized, rehabilitated and reintegrated.

“The Security Council remains strongly concerned about the continued high number of perpetrators who persist in committing violations and abuses against children in situations of armed conflict in open disregard of its resolutions on the matter. The Council stresses its commitment to effectively deal with persistent perpetrators and welcomes in this regard the ongoing consideration by its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of options for increasing pressure on persistent perpetrators of violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict, in accordance with its resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2068 (2012).

“The Security Council underlines the importance of concrete time-bound action plans to prevent and halt violations and abuses committed against children, and reiterates its call on parties to armed conflict listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict that have not already done so, to prepare and implement, without further delay and in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, action plans, to halt recruitment and use of children, patterns of killing and maiming of children, recurrent attacks on schools and/or hospitals, recurrent attacks or threats of attacks against protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals, in violation of applicable international law, as well as rape and other sexual violence against children.

“The Security Council also reiterates its call to all parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict to address all other violations and abuses committed against children and undertake specific commitments and measures in this regard.

“The Security Council encourages Member States to devise ways, in close consultations with the United Nations country-level task force on monitoring and reporting and United Nations country teams, to facilitate the development and implementation of time-bound action plans, and the review and monitoring by the United Nations country-level task force of obligations and commitments relating to the protection of children and armed conflict.

“The Security Council welcomes the increased engagement between concerned Governments and the United Nations at country-level for better protection of children affected by armed conflict, and notes the value of inter-ministerial committees as a successful framework for partnership with Governments to discuss and follow up on child protection commitments, and to foster action plan implementation.

“The Security Council recognizes that sufficient and sustained resources are critical to the protection efforts of children affected by armed conflict, especially the timely implementation of action plans. The Council requests the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to devise ways to coalesce the donor community in order to address funding gaps, in particular to ensure the timely and sustainable funding of action plans and associated monitoring, and encourages bilateral and international partners to provide financial support and capacity-building in this regard.

“The Security Council reiterates its readiness to adopt targeted and graduated measures against persistent perpetrators of violations and abuses committed against children, taking into account the relevant provisions of its resolutions 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2068 (2012) and to consider including provisions pertaining to parties to armed conflict that engage in activities in violation of applicable international law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflicts, when establishing, modifying or renewing the mandate of relevant Sanctions regimes. The Security Council encourages its relevant sanctions committees to continue to invite the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to brief them on specific information pertaining to her mandate that would be relevant to the work of the committees and encourages the sanctions committees to bear in mind the relevant recommendations of the Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict and encourages the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to share specific information contained in the Secretary-General’s reports with relevant sanctions committees expert groups. The Council further requests enhanced exchange of pertinent information on violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict between its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and relevant sanctions committees and their expert groups.

“The Security Council stresses that ending impunity and holding perpetrators accountable is a crucial element in halting and preventing violations and abuses committed against children and recalls the primary responsibility of States in that regard, including to hold accountable

those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other egregious crimes perpetrated against children. The Security Council recognizes that lack of capacity and resources can hamper efforts of national authorities to effectively prosecute alleged perpetrators of crimes against children in situations of armed conflict. The Security Council calls upon relevant United Nations entities, as well as Member States to support efforts to strengthen national accountability mechanisms, including building investigative and prosecutorial capacities.

“The Security Council stresses further that the fight against impunity and to ensure accountability for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other egregious crimes perpetrated against children has been strengthened through the work on and prosecution of these crimes in the international criminal justice system, ad hoc and mixed tribunals, as well as specialized chambers in national tribunals. The Security Council highlights in this regard the contribution of the International Criminal Court, in accordance with the principle of complementarity to national criminal jurisdictions as set out in the Rome Statute, towards holding accountable those responsible for such crimes. In this regard, the Security Council reiterates its call on the importance of State cooperation with these courts and tribunals in accordance with the States’ respective obligations.

“The Security Council underlines the importance of engaging armed forces and armed groups on child protection concerns during peace talks and calls upon Member States, United Nations entities and other parties concerned to ensure that child protection provisions, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, are integrated into all peace negotiations and peace agreements.

“The Security Council further calls upon Member States, United Nations entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission and other parties concerned to ensure that post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies prioritize issues concerning children affected by armed conflict.

“The Security Council reaffirms the important role being played by Child Protection Advisers in peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions deployed in line with the Council’s relevant country-specific resolutions and in accordance with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations’ Policy Directive on Mainstreaming the Protection Rights and Well-being of Children affected by Armed Conflict and in this regard expresses its intention to further strengthen provisions for the protection of children in all mandates of relevant United Nations peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions, including through ensuring the consistent deployment of child protection advisors.

“The Security Council welcomes the continued strengthening of the Monitoring and Reporting mechanism as requested by its resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011), and commends the role of UNICEF and other UN entities at the field level in the collection of information on violations and abuses committed against children, in the preparation and implementation of action plans, as well as in the implementation of the conclusions of its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. In this regard, the Council further encourages the Secretary-General to ensure that adequate child protection expertise is available to the Resident Coordinator in situations listed in the annexes of the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

“The Security Council reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that, in all his reports on country-specific situations, the matter of children and armed conflict is included as a specific aspect of the report, and expresses its intention to give its full attention to the information provided therein, including the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions and of the recommendations of its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, when dealing with those situations on its agenda, as well as to give specific attention to child protection issues when undertaking its relevant field visits.

“The Security Council recognizes the valuable contribution pertinent regional and sub-regional organizations and arrangements make for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. In this regard, the Security Council encourages the continued mainstreaming of child protection into the advocacy, policies, programmes and mission planning of these organizations and arrangements, as well as training of personnel and inclusion of child protection staff in their peacekeeping and field operations and establishment, within their secretariats, of child protection mechanisms, including through the appointment of child protection focal points.

“The Security Council stresses the important role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in carrying out her mandate for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as the importance of her country visits in facilitating better coordination among United Nations partners at the field level, promoting collaboration between the United Nations and concerned Governments, enhancing dialogue with concerned Governments and parties to an armed conflict, including by negotiating action plans, securing commitments, advocating for appropriate response mechanisms and ensuring attention and follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

“The Security Council recalls its invitation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to brief the Security Council on questions relating to the delisting process and progress made, enabling an exchange of views.

“The Security Council commends the sustained activity of its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and stresses the importance of continuing to adopt timely conclusions and recommendations, in line with its resolution 1612 (2005), and subsequent resolutions. Furthermore, the Council invites its Working Group to make full use of its toolkit (S/2006/724) in light of ongoing discussions on enhancing compliance, and in this regard to continue considering the issue of persistent perpetrators and action plan implementation.

“The Security Council reiterates its determination to ensure respect for and the implementation of its resolutions and presidential statements on children and armed conflict to date, as well as respect for other international commitments and obligations for the protection of children affected by armed conflict.”

Background

The Security Council had before it the Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict (document A/67/845-S/2013/245) for its debate today on that subject.

Briefings

LEILA ZERROUGUI, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, presenting the Secretary-General’s annual report on that issue, said that, despite marked progress during 2012, particularly in relation to parties to the conflict and action plans, disturbing trends had arisen. “The evolving nature and tactics of armed conflict have created unprecedented threats for children. The absence of clear frontlines and identifiable opponents and the increasing use of terror tactics have made children more vulnerable,” she said. Non-State armed groups comprised 46 of the 55 perpetrators listed in the report’s annexes, she pointed out, welcoming the Council’s innovative ways to address the issue.

In Mali, which she noted was included in the Secretary-General’s report for the first time, children were being recruited by all armed groups active in the north. As well, they were also being associated with pro-Government militias to engage in combat and other tasks. It was crucial, as the country transitioned towards stability, to end that association and to install prevention measures to that effect. As well, children were being detained by Malian security forces for alleged association with armed groups.

“I call upon the Malian authorities to treat these children in line with international standards,” she stated. Those who attacked children, schools and hospitals must be held to account. She called on all stakeholders to ensure the best interests of children were

adequately taken into account in the context of ongoing peace talks.

In the Central African Republic, she continued, two thirds of children separated from armed groups in 2012 were being re-recruited by the Seleka coalition in the beginning of 2013. Many children had been killed and injured during clashes in Bangui in April 2013. Over 2 million children lacked basic services; hundreds of thousands lacked access to education. Further action was needed to punish the perpetrators to enhance justice and protection for children. She called on relevant stakeholders to ensure child protection was central to ongoing discussions to implement the Libreville Agreement.

Turning to Syria, she underscored that grave violations against children continued on a massive scale. Since she last briefed the Council, scores of them had been killed, injured, maimed, detained, tortured, recruited and forced to commit atrocities. “If not for these children, then for whom will this Council act?”, she asked. She intended to visit Syria and the region in the coming days to assess first-hand the conflict’s consequences for them, and would brief the Council upon her return.

There were also new areas of concern for children, she said, including military use of schools, detention of children for alleged association with armed groups and the impact of drones on children, which should be addressed as a priority. The report also highlighted progress in the past 18 months to protect children, notably with non-State parties. Many concerned Governments had accepted the framework installed by Council resolutions and had engaged with the United Nations on steps to better protect children. A growing number of inter-ministerial committees were now working with the Organization. As well, the Governments of Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Philippines had developed legislation that criminalized violations against children, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had adopted child protection guidelines; cooperation with the African Union was ongoing.

In 2012, she said, four action plans to end the recruitment and use of children had been signed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan. In line with resolution 1882 (2009), an action plan on killing and maiming children was signed with the Somali Government, and provisions on sexual violence against children were included in the action plan signed with the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Government. That enabled the United Nations to support Governments in identifying, releasing and reintegrating children in their ranks.

Currently, she noted, all armed forces listed in the annexes for recruitment and use of children had entered into an action plan. Six had signed on to a plan; the remaining two were in the final stages of negotiation. “One of the key objectives of this mandate, the end of recruitment and use of children by armed forces, is finally within reach,” she said. In that

regard, her office would launch an unprecedented, ambitious campaign to end children's association with State armed forces in armed conflict by 2016. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had agreed to join, and she urged Council members to support it.

Further, the deployment of Child Protection Advisers to peacekeeping missions must continue and must grow, she said. UNICEF's role in child protection was vital. It must be given the necessary support. In closing, she said that, despite notable progress, there was no time for complacency. Dialogue with non-State parties, engagement with concerned Governments, focus on capacity-building and the Council's strong commitment had yielded significant results for children.

"Children in armed conflict need to know that the Council listens and that all victims will receive the necessary protection. Perpetrators also need to receive the strongest signal from the Council that their crimes will not go unpunished and that impunity will end. I call upon this Council to continue to unite in this endeavour," she said.

HERVÉ LADSOUS, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said that the Secretary-General's report was a stark reminder that "the situation of children in conflict remains dire and that our sustained engagement — both at the political and operational levels — is vital". Therefore, the deployment of a dedicated and specialized capacity of Child Protection Advisers in peacekeeping was critically important.

Those Advisers, he said, ensured that child protection concerns were reflected at all levels of the mission's strategic planning and operational activities. Consequently, deliberate attention had been paid to child protection at the earliest stages of mission planning, including at the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). There and elsewhere, one of the key tasks of Child Protection Advisers was the monitoring and reporting of grave violations of the rights of children.

A second priority, he said, was the negotiation for action plans to end the recruitment and use of children, the commission of sexual violence against children, and the killing and maiming of children. Peacekeeping missions contributed both to the negotiation of such action plans and to their implementation. Action plans recently signed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan continued to yield concrete outcomes for children.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he pointed out that screening for children by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo troops had resulted in the release of over 1,300 children in 2012. In South Sudan, a revised action plan had

given the United Nations mission and UNICEF access to 71 barracks where hundreds of children had been released. It was encouraging that child protection had been institutionalized in South Sudan through the creation of a Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) child protection unit and the inclusion of child protection soldiers in the SPLA training curriculum.

Lastly, he said, Child Protection Advisers advised all mission components on specific aspects of child protection relevant to their work. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations was committed to ensuring that child protection received attention throughout the peace consolidation process. The political engagement of peacekeeping operations had helped lay the groundwork for institution-building, highlighting child protection in national agendas, including, among others, Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire. Such efforts, however, required integrated action by civilian and uniformed components alike. At the headquarters level, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had invested in providing guidance and developing training on standards on child protection for peacekeepers.

Awareness of the professional obligations of peacekeepers to protect children, and their accountability to meet those obligations in Mali and other theatres where the United Nations operated, was critical. In that regard, he stressed the need for pre-deployment training and vetting procedures. In addition, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations would deploy a mobile training team for the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) personnel deployed there.

YOKA BRANDT, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF, said that, in 2012, armed conflicts had intensified in reach and brutality, with civilians, particularly children, being targeted, traumatized, maimed and killed. Besides long-term emotional and psychological impact on children, such attacks also destroyed vital social infrastructure, like roads and power supplies, and deprived children from accessing essential basic services, like schools and hospitals, turning injuries into life-long disabilities.

"We urge parties to conflict then", she stated, "to adopt different tactics and rules of engagement. We urge that they neither position their troops among civilians nor target each other in the middle of villages, towns and cities. And we urge that they adopt rules to guide how and how explosive devices can be used."

She said she was also deeply concerned by the use of schools in military operations, which posed grave risks to children and educators. However, it was encouraging that the Philippines and other countries had restricted that use of schools by the armed forces and had continued to strengthen relevant laws and guidelines. She called on others to follow suit in order to preserve schools as places of learning and safe havens for children.

Complying with international child rights norms and standards, she continued, was also crucial and must remain the focus as persistent perpetrators on the list were addressed. In addition, action plans, critical to committing parties to halt violations, must be fully implemented. In that regard, country task forces were developing ways to expedite implementation of action plans by setting benchmarks, holding regular dialogue between the United Nations and parties, and addressing bottlenecks to progress.

However, more must be done, she stressed. A greater focus on prevention was needed, by making sure children were safe in their families and secure in their communities. The world had failed many children. But, the story of one 15-year-old former child soldier in Central African Republic should inspire. Upon learning that his family had held a funeral for him after he was abducted, he was determined to tell them that he was alive. He joined a centre for child soldiers and prepared to return to his village and reclaim his life. “Better late than never,” the child had said.

GREGORY RAMM, Associate Vice-President, Save the Children, highlighted several priority areas, including the need to end sexual violence against children in armed conflict. Such violence against children required specific protection and child-sensitive responses; however, those needs were frequently ignored. He called on Member States to place children at the centre of international action on sexual violence in conflict, ensuring the necessary resources, expertise and political backing for prevention and response, and holding perpetrators accountable.

He said that the use of explosive devices in armed conflict also had devastating consequences for children. In Syria, Save the Children staff had witnessed those effects first hand, he said, describing the experience of one child whose school was destroyed by such a weapon. He called on States to refrain from the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects, by revising and strengthening military policies and procedures, supporting the collection and sharing of data with the United Nations, and holding to account those who used such weapons.

In Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, he went on to say, his organization was assisting over 300,000 children and their families. Security Council members must unite to work towards a negotiated settlement and, in the meantime, ensure that humanitarian assistance was funded and was reaching populations most in need. Greater efforts were also needed to end the use of schools for military purposes. In that vein, he called on the Council to ensure that attacks on schools were acted upon in accordance with resolution 1998 (2011), that victims received support and that future attacks be prevented.

In Mali, he continued, Save the Children was working to reunite children separated from their families in the recent conflict, and to offer psychosocial and other support. It was also working on implementing training for child protection, including mandatory pre-deployment training for peacekeepers. He encouraged the Council to ensure that the matter of children in the armed conflict agenda remained strong. “Children throughout the world need you to spare them from suffering before more violations occur”, he concluded.

Statements

JEAN ASSELBORN, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, said that, in Syria, to date, close to 3 million children had been affected by the conflict and thousands had lost their lives. Many others had been subjected to atrocious torture or sexual violence. Even those who had escaped the worst would be unable to live a normal life. More than half of the country’s hospitals had been damaged or rendered inoperable, and 2,500 schools had been partially or completely destroyed. Although those might appear to be abstract figures, many shattered lives hid behind them.

“This cannot go on,” he said. Since the Security Council had decided a dozen years ago to resolutely take on the issue of children and armed conflict, nine resolutions and 11 presidential statements had been adopted on the matter. He urged the Council to monitor its decisions consistently and to translate them into action. In that regard, he stressed the importance of having action plans in place, welcoming the removal of two countries from the “list of shame” after implementation of their action plans.

JEFFERY DELAURENTIS (United States), stating his Government’s commitment to combat violence against children in conflict-torn countries, said there was no starker example of where children needed the international community’s help than in Syria. Turning to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where armed groups were recruiting, killing and maiming children, he welcomed that Government’s signing of an action plan last October to end children recruitment and he called for its expeditious implementation. He also noted Myanmar’s progress towards implementing its July 2012 action plan by releasing dozens of children within its military recruits last year.

However, he lamented the increase in 2012 of the unlawful recruitment of children. The Council required more effective ways to deal with the growing number of persistent perpetrators, particularly among armed groups. That raised a larger issue about the United Nations’ process, where action plans were only one tool to protect children. Rather than making children protection a one-size-fits-all approach, it must be used in tandem with other strategies. A wide range of efforts to hold perpetrators to account were needed. The conviction of Thomas Lubanga by the International Criminal Court for recruiting children sent an important message that such crimes would not be tolerated.

SAMIR SHARIFOV ([Azerbaijan](#)) said Azerbaijan's determination to protect civilians, including children, was based on his country's practical experience in addressing serious human rights violations committed during the war unleashed against it. Azerbaijan had one of the highest numbers of refugees and displaced persons, including children, worldwide. He welcomed progress to respond to violations against children and encouraged the Special Representative to fulfil her mandate with respect to all situations of armed conflict, including those of a protracted nature. No official or political status could grant impunity for the most serious crimes against children.

MARIO OYARZÁBAL ([Argentina](#)) said that Child Protection Advisers should be used in all peacekeeping missions. In addition, greater coordination between child protection systems and the various sanctions regimes was necessary in order to make it possible to enact sanctions against those responsible for grave violations against children. It was fundamentally States' responsibility to protect civilians, and to investigate incidents of infringements of international law, including on children, he said, adding that the International Criminal Court existed when States were unable or unwilling to do so. He also expressed concern at the growing use of schools for military purposes, and at the increase in attacks on school teachers and children, which should be a priority concern of the international community.

GARY QUINLAN ([Australia](#)) said that the last decade had seen an expanded arsenal of tools against violations of children's rights. However, grave violations continued on a daily basis. The situation in Syria was dire, with thousands of children killed, injured or tortured, and one in five schools destroyed or turned into shelters, depriving children of their education. He also expressed concern about the situation of children in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and about the large number of children recruited in the Central African Republic. Encouraging the Special Representative to continue to engage with armed groups on drafting action plans, he said that the Council should make better use of its sanctions regime, adding to sanctions lists those whose child rights violations would qualify them. Finally, he stressed, impunity for those responsible for violations of the rights of children must come to an end.

EVGENY ZAGAYNOV ([Russian Federation](#)) called for careful investigations of the killing and wounding of children due to drones. The Council's Working Group and other mechanisms must focus chiefly on major situations of armed conflict. There should be strict compliance with existing arrangements of work distribution among relevant United Nations entities. Furthermore, the Special Representative's mandate did not cover protection of children as a whole. Rather, it covered protection just in armed conflict. He did not see justification for interpreting it as a broader mandate.

He stressed the importance of the current priority to bring pressure upon perpetrators. The Special Representative must draw up clear procedures for listing and delisting of parties in the annexes. But, no progress had been made in resolving that problem. Before dealing with persistent perpetrators, it must be understood how they were classified as such. The current criteria used in the report were superficial. A lack of clear criteria gave rise to a lack of trust in that instrument. Sanctions were not a cure-all. Cooperation with States engulfed in conflict was vital.

GÉRARD ARAUD ([France](#)) said the fact that 20 action plans had been signed represented genuine progress, and he lauded the Chad Government's willingness to finalize their plan. Because speedy implementation of such agreements was vital, the United Nations must dedicate the necessary resources to work towards that end. Children were the first victims of conflict, as demonstrated in Syria, where they were tortured, raped and subjected to all forms of violence, and where schools were being bombed incessantly. More than 650,000 children had been killed since the beginning of the crisis.

He encouraged the Special Representative to form an action plan with the Syrian Government to end such violations. As well, citing violations against children in Mali, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he said that the long list of persistent perpetrators affected the credibility of the United Nations action plans and he called for a better response. The fight against impunity must be central. He urged that a dialogue with the International Criminal Court be strengthened, with its Prosecutor briefing the Council in that regard as an immediate step.

GERT ROSENTHAL ([Guatemala](#)) noted that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians fell on the State. It was also true that new tactics emerging in conflicts represented threats without precedent to States, particularly in the case of protecting their children. Of great concern, as well, was the use of unmanned aircraft, drones, in areas inhabited by civilians, where reports showed increased casualties among children. Turning to the Council's work, he said the body should further consider use of a sanctions regime. There were currently four sanctions committees with criteria for the designation of serious violations of the rights of children — Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan. Further work was needed to ensure the imposition of sanctions against offenders. As for action plans to halt the recruitment of children, he welcomed the growing number of participating States. But, from his country's experience, he stressed that the signing of peace accords was also crucial.

KODJO MENAN ([Togo](#)) said that, although some achievements had been made over the past decade, nevertheless, the international community should not lose sight of the fact that many children remained victims of attacks, explosions and drone strikes. Furthermore, there was also an increase in the use of children to commit suicide bombings or as human shields. In Syria, where 93,000 deaths had been recorded in the recent conflict, children had

not been spared. The situation on the African continent was also dim, as children were recruited, used, killed, maimed or otherwise violated. The targeting of hospitals and schools by armed groups, including their use as military bases and torture and interrogation centres, was troubling, as well. A lack of resources for implementing action plans was a problem in those countries that had signed them, he said, pointing out that it was difficult to reach armed groups in order to negotiate such plans. States should ensure that necessary resources were earmarked for such implementations. It was important to work with armed groups in a spirit of open and frank dialogue, he stated, adding that all such measures would be ineffective if impunity was not also tackled.

KIM SOOK (Republic of Korea) expressed concern about emerging challenges for child protection, including the detention of children by security forces, among others. The situation in Syria was particularly worrying, with thousands of children having been killed. Noting the work of the International Criminal Court and ad hoc and mixed tribunals, he stressed that ending impunity was the key to preventing and halting violations and abuses against children, as well as ensuring their non-recurrence. The Court's guilty verdict on Thomas Lubanga last year was a landmark decision. Equally important was for all States to continue their efforts to strengthen national mechanisms, including domestic criminal laws and executive and judicial systems. Concrete and time-bound action plans were key tools for protecting children from current and future abuse. The Security Council should put increasing pressure on persistent perpetrators, including the adoption of targeted and graduated measures. To this end, links between the children and armed conflict agenda and the sanctions regimes should be further strengthened.

LOTFI BOUCHAARA (Morocco) said that the signing of peace agreements and the implementation of national action plans had made it possible to relaunch investigation procedures and criminal proceedings against those responsible for crimes committed against children. The establishment in July 2011 of the Human Rights Diligence Policy could help to strengthen efforts to protect children in armed conflict. In addition, prevention strategies required a global, integrated approach, in particular with regards to laws that prohibited the recruitment of child soldiers, among other things. Protecting children in armed conflict also required the sustained support of the United Nations to provide technical assistance and build capacity, he said, adding that donors should be invited to meet insufficiencies in funding. The guidelines established by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should be updated on a regular basis, in particular with regard to the Terms of Reference of Child Protection Advisers.

EUGÈNE-RICHARD GASANA (Rwanda) said that the adequate protection of children was the primary responsibility — and moral obligation — of Governments. It was also an issue that should be supported in the work of the Security Council. Rwanda had established a national commission to promote children's rights and to protect them from violence, abuse and exploitation; a child protection system had been implemented at both the national and

local levels. However, he was concerned that violations continued to be committed against children in a number of conflict situations, and he called the implementation of all action plans. He also urged those who had not entered into relevant negotiations to do so as soon as possible. He reviewed a number of particular situations of armed conflict, calling, in particular, for the deployment of Child Protection Advisers in the new mission in Mali, and for Member States to use their leverage on the parties to the conflict in Syria.

MASOOD KHAN (Pakistan) said the use of armed drones violated sovereignty, caused civilian casualties, and put communities at risk of reprisal attacks. Urgent, intense negotiations were needed to address them. The mandate of children and armed conflict, including its reporting and monitoring procedures, should be strengthened. The focus should continue to be on situations of armed conflict and those threatening global peace and security. He was encouraged by the Special Representative's outreach to Member States to address their concerns in that regard. Every effort must be made to ensure information collected through the monitoring and reporting mechanism was accurate and verifiable. The Council should finalize objective, balanced listing and delisting criteria. The terms "armed attacks" and "armed groups" should be replaced with "terrorist attacks" and "terrorist groups" in cases where a clear determination had been made that the attacks were launched by terrorist groups.

WANG MIN (China), calling children the hope for human progress, said ensuring them secure, safe environments was dependent on the collective will of all Governments. To protect children from armed conflict, prevention and resolution of such conflicts, including the prevention of root causes, was crucial. The Secretary-General should not have a one-size-fits-all approach in that regard. Communication with concerned Governments to protect children must be strengthened. He encouraged the parties to armed conflict to respect and safeguard children's rights. He encouraged UNICEF, the World Bank and other international organs to help countries in conflict build capacity to protect children. His country, he stated, would do its part to save children from the sufferings of war.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom), speaking in his national capacity, said that the progress made by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as in other areas, was encouraging. However, a high level of ambition for the child protection agenda must be sustained. The new time-bound campaign, outlined by the Special Representative, to end the association of child with armed groups demonstrated such ambition, and he looked forward to the results of action plans currently under negotiations.

He called on the international community to address three main challenges: the implementation of action plans; the reintegration of children; and the combating of impunity. "Signing an action plan is only a first step," he said in that respect, stressing that all parties must honour their relevant commitments as soon as possible and that the international community must address funding gaps. Too often, children were entrapped in

the cycle of conflict. Efforts to reintegrate them into society were, therefore, needed. Finally, the crimes of perpetrators should be investigated and charges brought. The future of the children across the world depended on the United Nations' ability to rise to those challenges, he added.

NORACHIT SINHASANI (Thailand), noting that Thailand had been the first to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child last year, pointed out that his country was not in a situation of armed conflict, nor on the Security Council's agenda. However, it attached great importance to the issue of children and armed conflict, stating that it was imperative that every United Nations actor had a clear mandate and responsibility. The misinterpretation and overstretching of such mandates would not help reach the goal of protecting children. Child protection was the primary responsibility of every Government; the United Nations needed to work with the consent of the Governments concerned. Stressing the need for the collection of accurate, objective information, he added that it was imperative to see both listing and delisting criteria clearly clarified in the Secretary-General's report. For situations outside of armed conflict, an inclusive and holistic remedy through the promotion and protection of basic human rights, sustainable development efforts and security considerations must be adopted.

MOHAMED AL HAKIM (Iraq) said that violations against children by terrorist organizations, as included in the list, were worrisome. Iraq was suffering from such violations and his Government had taken steps to prevent terrorists from exploiting children, among others, ensuring that children stayed in school. Further, Iraqi laws prohibited inscription into the armed forces for anyone under the age of 18, and his country had signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol. A national body for children's protection had just been established, assisting school dropouts and poor children. Iraq would continue to cooperate with United Nations bodies to ensure the rights of children.

ASOKE KUMAR MUKERJI (India) noting that Indian peacekeeping troops were acutely aware that missions were not being given adequate resources, called for more Child Protection Advisers to the missions. As well, Indian troops had seen children used as combatants in armed conflict by so-called militia groups, and he urged the Council to examine the implications of that phenomenon. He also encouraged the Special Representative to continue working with national authorities to develop the capacity to deal with children and armed conflict.

However, he said, United Nations access to non-State armed groups must be carried out under the cooperation framework between the Organization and the concerned Government. As well, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, as well as security-sector programmes, must focus on guaranteeing children's safe return and reintegration into society. The United Nations Peacekeeping Fund could be used to form

reintegration projects. He also said that the Secretary-General's report had included issues beyond the mandate established in resolution 1379 (2001), which limited reporting to situations that threatened global peace and security. That had the potential of diverting already scarce resources for children and armed conflict issues.

MIGUEL CAMILO RUIZ BLANCO (Colombia) recalled a statement made by his nation's Foreign Minister in July 2011 at the Security Council that challenged the possibility of the United Nations or other multilateral organizations changing the mindset of terrorist groups, which, using terror as a modus operandi and children as a tool for their purposes, ignored national and international norms. In that sense, the monitoring mechanism should strengthen international pressure on terrorists groups so that they cease violence and their activities against children rather than creating procedures that might legitimize those illegal groups by granting them political status. Calls to the Secretariat to enter into direct contact with those groups while launching punishment mechanisms were contradictory. That could discourage countries that were working on the implementation of action plans and developing national capacities to prevent, combat and face such problems. Pursuing the establishment of targeted sanctions mechanisms "raises questions of all kinds", he said, questioning under which parameters such sanctions would be enforced on illegal armed groups.

AHMAD ALLAMA-MI (Chad), pointing out that his country had suffered the tribulations of many civil wars and had been a neighbour to several others, said that Chad had fulfilled its obligations to protect children, including refugee children. It had never denied the accidental presence of children among its armed forces in the past, as mistakes in determining the ages of young people had been inevitable. In 2011, it became possible to say that there were no longer child soldiers in Chad. The country's army should have been delisted from the Secretary-General's report at that time, but for a handful of incidents that remained. Indeed, the fact that Chad was still on the Secretary-General's annexed list demonstrated a campaign to denigrate its army.

He went on to say that, following a recent visit by the Special Representative, his Government was working to speed up the implementation of its action plan; such measures also included a Draft Directive, created with the support of UNICEF, and projects to prevent the recruitment of children. A law penalizing the recruitment of minors was also before Congress. He stressed that it was unfair that, for procedural reasons, the entire Chadian army should be listed on the Secretary-General's list, and its reputation tarnished before the eyes of the world.

GUILLERMO E. RISHCHYNSKI (Canada), speaking on behalf of the 38-member Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, welcomed the recent signing of action plans by the Governments of Myanmar, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He called on States to establish local "groups of friends", such as the one established in Kinshasa, to

support the implementation of those action plans. He further urged relevant States to allow for dialogue between the United Nations and non-State actors to influence them to cease violations against children and conclude and implement actions plans, and he called for greater transparency of action plans, asking signatories to widely disseminate action plan commitments to facilitate community-wide efforts. The next true test of the Council's work was how it dealt with the category of parties listed by the Secretary-General as "persistent perpetrators". Those parties to conflict, who chronically violated children's rights and had been listed in the Secretary-General's annexes for more than five years, made up more than half of the parties listed.

IOANNIS VRAILAS, representative of the European Union delegation, said that the Union's member States had spent €200 million in 2009-2012 on assistance related to children and armed conflict in the countries listed in the Secretary-General's report. The Union was also systematically addressing child protection in all of the bloc's crisis management missions and operations, and had adopted minimum training standards. More recently, a specialized training on children and armed conflict had been introduced to its diplomatic staff, in cooperation with UNICEF. Further, the Union's training missions, the most recent one being in Mali, provided training to armed forces on humanitarian and human rights law, among other issues. "Children have the right to be free from fear and want. Let us make sure that they can enjoy their childhoods so that they will become strong and self confident responsible members of our communities," he concluded.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said he regretted that the Special Representative had disregarded incidents documented by many governmental and non-governmental organizations that Salafists, fundamentalists and Wahhabi groups had recruited children. He also noted it had taken the Special Representative two years to include those groups in the list. Furthermore, the Special Representative should have included in her recommendation on Syria a request that such groups stop recruiting children, and that the unilateral coercive economic measures against the Syrian people be removed. It was alarming that the Special Representative had insisted on including the Syrian armed forces in the list, and had considered them responsible for attacking children, schools and hospitals and for committing sexual violence against children.

He went on to say that the Special Representative had visited Syria in 2012, met with senior Government officials and had made expanded field visits to schools, hospitals and shelters in Damascus. Yet, she had disregarded what she saw: that the Syrian Government was using schools as shelters for families, while armed terrorist groups continued their attacks against the Syrian Government, forcing people to take their children out of school. Terrorist groups had bombed the engineering school and other schools in Damascus, as well. They had destroyed and pillaged more than 35 per cent of Syrian hospitals. His Government had

given the Special Representative a video of that destruction, but there was no mention of that horrible crime in the Secretary-General's report. That incident alone should have convinced her to include the acts of armed terrorist groups in the Secretary-General's report.

The world had seen heinous crimes against children perpetrated by armed terrorist groups since the start of the conflict, he continued. A four-year-old child had been raped, dragged and hanged by a terrorist group. On the Al-Arabiya news channel, Salafists from Wahhabi had expressed their pride in cutting the throats of Syrian children, among other horrible crimes committed by the Al Nusra Front; those incidents should have been in the United Nations report. In addition, he asked how rape and abduction of women and girls as sexual slaves had not been mentioned in the report. He denounced paragraph 13 of the report for discussing the Syrian Republic, but not mentioning the suffering of Syrian children in the occupied Syrian Golan. His Government was committed to the protection of its citizens, particularly children, noting that, on 6 July of this year, it had added two articles to the penal code, criminalizing the involvement of children under 18 in combat of any sort and sentencing violators of that new code to 10 to 20 years of hard labour.

HAN THU (Myanmar) said that the Secretary-General's report had highlighted encouraging actions by his Government to prevent and end grave violations against children. The cases of recruitment and use of children by the national armed forces had dropped in number. The wide-ranging democratic reform by the new Government over the past two years, as well, had included its renewed commitment to promoting and protecting the fundamental rights of the people, including women and children. Further, the signing of the action plan between the Government and the United Nations country team in June 2012 was a historic development.

There were, he observed, reports of a slight increase in the number of complaints in 2012, up from 2011. The increase was not because of actual recruitment, but due to enhanced awareness of the complaint mechanism and the new-found freedom of expression. In just seven months following the signing of the action plan, 66 underage recruits had been demobilized and reintegrated with their parents. In 2012 alone, 538 potential recruits had been rejected at the screening stage. He also pointed out that the number of those demobilized might not yet match the list of suspected recruits, as it was time-consuming to check and verify them thoroughly across the country and as the list could also include fabricated complaints.

MALENGA OMOY CHARLOTTE (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that Congolese children were suffering at the hands of various armed groups, including the 23 March Movement and the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda. Violence had re-emerged in North Kivu since rebels had turned their guns against the regular army there. That had led to a resurgence of violence and a rash of new crimes, which disproportionately affected women and children. In the east of the country, many

children were being recruited by the 23 March Movement and forced to work in mines, where they suffered from health problems. Survivors, traumatized by the barbarous acts of the 23 March Movement rebels, required significant support.

Her country, she said, wished for specific measures to be taken to protect children, including their right to an education. However, armed groups were using schools and universities for military purposes, which violated the right to education protected under international conventions. She appealed to armed groups in the east of the country to put an end to child abuse and to respect their international obligations. The Security Council, for its part, should take into account the needs and the rights of children in all of its work.

CHARLES-ARMEL DOUBANE (Central African Republic) said that the subject at hand was of capital importance because it dealt with children, who were the future of mankind. The situation in the Central African Republic, which had slightly improved last year, had again become alarming, if not critical, following the crisis that led to regime change earlier this year. Children in the country faced serious difficulties. The Lords Resistance Army often attacked schools in search of child soldiers, as well as kitchen or sex slaves. Those children who fled into the brush were at the mercy of the elements. Schools, if not destroyed, became military barracks. With that sombre picture, the scourges of violence against children and child recruitment would end only if the rule of law prevailed and people could support themselves and protect their children. There must also be greater cooperation between the Government and partners, such as the United Nations, UNICEF, non-governmental organizations and others.

* * * * *