Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"To provide the world’s children with a safer future, we must spare no effort"

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Madam President

Thank you for your kind words on the United Kingdom’s Presidency of the Security Council in August and I wish you well for your stewardship of the Council in September.

Thank you also for convening today’s debate on Children and Armed Conflict. I want to recognise the presence of Foreign Minister Asselborn today. We commend Luxembourg’s strong leadership and unwavering commitment to this issue during its time on the Council, including through chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Let me also warmly thank all today’s briefers for their inspiring and moving statements.

Madam President

We have seen some progress on this dossier which is largely a result of the dedication and active engagement of the Secretary General’s Special Representative Leila Zerrougui as a tireless champion for children affected by conflict. Most recently in May, the Government of South Sudan and the SPLA in opposition committed to end grave violations against children and the Government of Yemen signed an action plan to end recruitment and use of children. We also welcome the Special Representative’s news that the Free Syrian Army has committed to end recruitment and the use of children.

Moreover, Ms Zerrougui, you have driven implementation of commitments through your effective advocacy, field visits and in particular by launching the campaign “Children, Not Soldiers” with UNICEF in March aimed at ending recruitment and use of children by government armed forces in conflict by 2016. As others have noted, the completion of Chad’s Action Plan has led to its de-listing from the annexes of the Secretary General’s Report. We urge Chad to continue building on this success and to share their experience with other governments. And we call on all parties, state and non-state, that have not yet concluded Action Plans to do so as a matter of priority and we call on those that have signed, to honour their commitments in full.

Madam President

Although this progress is welcome, the Secretary General's Report and the moving evidence we have heard today from the five briefers highlights the horrifying scale of violations still being committed against children in new and intensifying crises across the world today.

Given time constraints I shall mention just two. In Syria and the region, 5.5 million children are in need of education and more than half of them are out of school. We are facing a lost generation of Syrian children - traumatised, displaced and without education. Their lives have been disrupted and their future potential wasted with the obvious future risk of alienation and radicalisation.

That is why the United Kingdom is supporting UNICEF and others in Syria and the region to deliver the No Lost Generation initiative. This aims to increase support to education, psycho-social programmes and protection for the children of Syria. Partners are establishing child friendly spaces for Syrian children to safely play and study.

This past year has seen an increasing trend of attacks against, and military use of, schools as well as abductions and detention of children. In Nigeria, today marks the 148th day since over 200 schoolgirls were abducted in Chibok. 57 have escaped, but 219 are still missing and none have so far been rescued. These attacks are not only barbaric abuses of human rights; they deprive children of their right to education, they put and end to their innocence as they become hostages and instruments of conflict. Communities and families are torn apart by fear, trauma and loss.

Madam President

As Sandra Uwiringiyimana so movingly pleaded, we must do more to fight against impunity for crimes committed against children. The International Criminal Court has an important contribution to play. When the Council visited The Hague last month we called on the Court to hold perpetrators to account for all such egregious violations of international law. We urge the Secretary General and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to consider ways to increase pressure on persistent perpetrators of human rights violations and put an end to impunity. We owe that, at least, to victims like Sandra and her family.

Madam President

This debate is a reminder that children continue not only to be affected by conflict but, much worse, are often specifically targeted, coerced and exploited during conflict. The United Kingdom remains committed to work to prevent these abhorrent violations, to ensure the implementation of Action Plans and to tackle those who persist in committing violations against children. To provide the world's children with a safer future, we must spare no effort.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/to-provide-the-worlds-children-with-a-safer-future-we-must-spare-no-effort--2