

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL HEARS FROM SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Concludes General Debate on the Update by the High Commissioner on the Activities of her Office

10 September 2013

The Human Rights Council this morning held an interactive dialogue with Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, and concluded its general debate on the [update](#) by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the activities of her office.

Ms. Zerrougui, presenting her report, said that as she was providing this update, schools were about to reopen but millions of children around the world would miss this opportunity because of conflict. During her recent visit to Syria and neighbouring countries, she had met many children and their families, who expressed the horrors of the conflict, their fears and their preoccupation for their children's loss of education. In all conflict situations, grave violations had continued unabated. During the period under review, Somalia had remained the country with the largest number of children associated with armed groups. The relapse into conflict in the Central African Republic and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo had affected the most vulnerable, and children previously separated from armed groups had been re-recruited. The role of the Human Rights Council, through the panoply of its tools and its broad mandate on all human rights, was especially important to ensure children's rights at times of conflict.

During the interactive dialogue with the Special Representative, delegations expressed their grave concern with regard to the disproportionate negative effect of armed conflicts on children, who were innocent victims of attacks. The recruitment of child soldiers and the increasing number of child victims of armed conflicts around the world were appalling. Attacks on schools and hospitals remained of grave concern in many conflict situations, and could amount to war crimes. The children's plight was often exacerbated by limitations or restrictions on humanitarian access. The situation of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation, as well as the current status of the Syrian children, were expressive examples of the scourges that children witnessed at the time of armed conflict. International law provided special protection for children, but the gap between legislation and implementation remained very wide. Holistic reintegration and rehabilitation programmes were needed to ensure that former child soldiers were provided with the appropriate assistance and reintegrated into civilian life.

Speaking in the interactive dialogue on children in armed conflict were the European Union, Gabon on behalf of the African Group, Ireland, China, Palestine on behalf of the Arab Group, Algeria, Thailand, France, Qatar, Pakistan, Cuba on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, Morocco, United States, Paraguay, Australia, Egypt, Slovenia, Sierra Leone, Georgia, Poland, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, Syria, Italy, Cuba, Sri Lanka, Luxembourg, Cuba, Kuwait, Belgium, Slovakia, Switzerland, South Sudan, Chad, Republic of Korea, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Palestine, Nigeria, Maldives, Germany, United Nations Children's Fund, Holy See, Latvia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Portugal and Venezuela.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Council concluded its general debate on the [update](#) provided on 9 September by High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay on the activities of her office.

During the general debate, several speakers expressed their concern about the excessive use of violence by security forces in Egypt. The scale of human rights violations in Egypt demanded an urgent, impartial, independent and full investigation. Other speakers brought attention on the human rights situation in Iraq, especially with regard to the death penalty. In Sri Lanka, human rights defenders continued to be subjected to attacks, intimidation and reprisals. A speaker asked why so many days had passed since the chemical weapons attack in Syria on 21 August without the Human Rights Council calling for an emergency session. Human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender orientation were a matter of ongoing and urgent concern.

Speaking this morning in the general debate were the following non-governmental organizations: Canadian HIV Legal Network, International Federation for Human Right Leagues, Canners International Permanent Committee, United Nations Watch, International Institute for Peace, International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies, International Service for Human Rights, Union of Arab Jurists, Women's Human Rights International Association, International Association for Democracy in Africa, Amnesty International, Liberation, International

Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, World Environment and Resources Council, *Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples* and World Muslim Congress.

Iraq spoke in a right of reply.

The Council will resume its work this afternoon at 3 p.m. to conclude its interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict and to start a clustered interactive dialogue with the Working Group on mercenaries, and the Independent Expert on democratic and equitable international order.

General Debate on Update by the High Commissioner on the Activities of her Office

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network shared concern about human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender orientation, a matter of ongoing and urgent concern. The High Commissioner was encouraged to continue to integrate these issues throughout the work of the Office and the time had come for the Council to more consistently address these human rights violations.

International Federation for Human Rights Leagues expressed, with regards to Egypt, utmost concern about unlawful and excessive use of violence by security forces in the last months and about the state of emergency declared by the Egyptian Presidency. In the Central African Republic, the de facto authorities were failing to ensure the security of the population and impunity was almost total.

Canners International Permanent Committee said that in places dominated by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the old, harsh Islamic punishments were being meted out. It was surprising and worrying to hear about attempts to negotiate an arrangement with the Taliban as if they were honest interlocutors or likely to be responsible and serious players in fashioning Afghanistan's future polity.

United Nations Watch asked why so many days had passed since the chemical weapons attack in Syria on 21 August without the Human Rights Council calling for an emergency session. Where was the Council's moral outrage? Where was the urgency? It was time for the United Nations to stop helping murderous regimes and celebrating them in its bodies.

International Institute for Peace said human rights problems plagued South Asian States. Bangladesh, in particular, where elections would be held this year, had to live up to its potential as a liberal, secular and progressive nation. The Awami League's leadership in bringing closure to Bangladesh's bloody past should find more support in the west.

International Institute for Non-aligned Studies focused on death, violence and discrimination around the world, in particular that faced by women and girls, who make up 70 percent of the world's poor. Their low status with regard to access to education, health services and political and economic opportunities was holding back the cause of human rights the world over.

International Service for Human Rights shared the High Commissioner's concerns at reports of harassment and reprisals against people who cooperated with the United Nations during the High Commissioner's recent visit to Sri Lanka. Human rights defenders continued to be subjected to attacks, intimidation and reprisals. The Council should recognise the primary responsibility of States to uphold the right to access and communicate with human rights bodies.

Union of Arab Jurists thanked the High Commissioner for her statement on Iraq, in which she expressed her concern about the death penalty in Iraq. In addition to the 72 prisoners executed in 2013, 1,200 languished on death row, with an immediate risk of execution. All human rights violations in Iraq should be investigated by an international independent body and a Special Rapporteur on Iraq should be appointed.

Women's Human Rights International Association said she was the mother of a 20-year-old man, a resident of Camp Ashraf who was killed during an attack against the Camp on September 1. Fifty-two residents were killed and six women were taken hostage during the attack. Iraqi officials had failed to conduct an effective investigation. The United Nations should conduct a full and independent investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

International Association for Democracy in Africa said that a decade after the international coalition took on the task of eradicating terrorism, the threat from Al Qaeda and its affiliates remained intact. One could even say that Al Qaeda had been victorious since its depredations had fragmented heterogeneous democratic societies on the basis of religion and colour, and set communities against each other.

Amnesty International said that the scale of human rights violations in Egypt demanded an urgent, impartial, independent and full investigation, the report of which must be shared with the Egyptian people and the international community. Sri Lanka's intolerance of dissent and continued failure to ensure justice illustrated that insufficient action was being taken to end impunity and protect human rights.

Liberation regarding Sri Lanka said that the militarisation of Tamil areas and the subjugation of the Tamil people continued. Sri Lanka was willfully violating its international obligations, defying resolutions adopted in this chamber and abusing the rights of many of its people.

International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination said that deplorable violations of human rights in Iraq included arbitrary arrests and detentions. Under the guise of counterterrorism, torture and the lack of due process were widespread. The perpetrators had to be made accountable by the Human Rights Council.

World Environment and Resources Council said that increasing transnational terrorism was a drain on national resources and undermined the human rights principles upon which the democracies under attack had been founded. The international community had to work together on a coherent and multilayered counterterrorism strategy.

Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples thanked the High Commissioner for her attention to discrimination against Roma in many European States, including in France. It also welcomed the High Commissioner's focus on food security as a human rights issue and reported summary executions in Camp Ashraf, Iraq.

World Muslim Congress shared the High Commissioner's concerns regarding the human rights crisis in Syria, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other situations mentioned in the report. However, it was dismayed that Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir failed to get the attention of the High Commissioner. Rape, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and the use of lethal weapons on peaceful protestors continued to be the tools of repression and intimidation.

Right of Reply

Iraq, speaking in a right of reply, said that the Government had investigated the events that occurred in Camp Ashraf. There was no intervention from any Iraqi military or security force. No firearms were used against the residents of the Camp, in line with Iraq's international obligations and with the relevant agreements. It was noted that the residents of the Camp refused to allow any international scrutiny. Iraq called on all to stop these baseless allegations.

Documentation

The Council has before it a **note by the Secretariat on the report of the annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict** ([A/HRC/24/35](#)).

The Council has before it an **oral update of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict** ([A/HRC/24/CRP.1](#)).

Presentation by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

LEILA ZERROUGUI, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said that as she was providing this update, schools were about to reopen but millions of children around the world would miss this opportunity because of conflict. During her recent visit to Syria and neighbouring countries, she had met many children and their families, internally displaced or refugees, who expressed the horrors of the conflict, their fears and their preoccupation for their children's loss of education. Since the start of the conflict in Syria, three million children had either sought refuge outside the country or become internally displaced, and since the last school year, nearly two million had dropped out of school. Syrian children were not alone. In all conflict situations, grave violations had continued unabated. Not only

had children been deprived of the right to education but, every day, they were killed and maimed, subjected to sexual violence, recruited and used by armed forces and groups. Children were also forced to witness and commit atrocities. During the period under review, Somalia had remained the country with the largest number of children associated with armed groups. The relapse into conflict in the Central African Republic and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo had affected the most vulnerable, and children previously separated from armed groups and forces had been re-recruited. Children were vulnerable to the use of all means of warfare, especially when they were employed in disregard of universally accepted principles of proportionality.

Parties to conflict had to do more and could do more to minimize killing and maiming of children as a result of military operation, and international treaties banning cluster munitions and chemical weapons had to be respected. Attacks on schools and hospitals remained of grave concern in many conflict situations. Advances in national legislation and policies were underway in many countries, however too often these efforts failed to translate into effective protection for children and accountability for child rights violations were rare. In Yemen, the Special Representative had secured the Government's commitment to end recruitment and use of children, resulting in the adoption last week of an action plan elaborated with the support of the United Nations. Since a visit to Chad, joint efforts by the Government and the United Nations were ongoing towards reaching full compliance with the Action Plan signed in 2009. In countries neighbouring Syria, the Special Representative had witnessed the daunting challenges faced by host Governments, the United Nations and children protection partners as they struggled to alleviate children's suffering, to mitigate the impact of conflict and displacement. The Special Representative had also engaged with non-state actors to end and prevent violations against children, engaging with the leadership of the Al Houthi armed group in Yemen, establishing contact with commanders of the Free Syrian Army, and with dialogue with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, among others.

Ms. Zerrougui said she had decided to launch a global initiative to end the recruitment and use of children by Government security forces in armed conflict by 2016. The role of the Human Rights Council, through the panoply of its tools and its broad mandate on all human rights, was especially important to ensure children's rights at times of conflict. They had to strengthen their collective action to respond to the plight of conflict-affected children. More had to be done to translate commitment into action and to save children from the scourge of conflict.

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

European Union said the issue of children in armed conflict remained at the top of the human rights agenda. Eleven new parties from four ongoing conflicts had been included in the Secretary-General's most recent list of shame. Respect for laws already in place needed to be strengthened. Forty-six of 55 perpetrators listed were non-State actors: how was the Special Representative planning to sanction non-State actors listed as abusers of children in armed conflict? The European Union had used the money from the Nobel Peace Prize it won to fund assistance programmes for children affected by armed conflict.

Gabon, speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that in spite of progress made in 2012 to protect children living in countries affected by armed conflict, concerns about the use of children in armed conflict remained. New and ongoing crises posed a growing threat to children and it was a matter of great concern that many such crises were taking place in Africa. The creation of a generation without education and culture should be a matter of urgency to the international community. The African Group echoed the Special Representative's recommendation addressed to the international community to support programmes for the social and economic rehabilitation of former child soldiers.

Ireland said it was impressive that all armed forces listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report from May this year had entered into an action plan process. Ensuring the effective implementation of those action plans was the next key challenge in this area. The widespread closure of schools in Syria because of bombings, appropriation by armed forces and insecurity would have an obvious long-term effect on the literacy of a generation. Ireland agreed that more must be done to get children back to school in Syria and elsewhere such as the Central African Republic. What further steps could be taken by the international community to assist children to attend school in conflict affected areas?

China supported the active role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to protect children from harm during conflicts. Preventive diplomacy should be used to prevent and reduce conflicts and thus reduce the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Children's reintegration in school and in their families should be priorities in post-conflict reconstruction. It was important to safeguard peace and stability for children's sake.

Palestine, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said that children were a vulnerable category in terms of human rights protection, especially in the context of armed conflicts. The international community had the responsibility to protect children, who should not be targeted during conflicts. In recent years, the number of child victims had increased, as well as the number of children being recruited. Children in the occupied Palestinian territory lived in a dire situation, notably with regard to access to housing, education and healthcare.

Algeria thanked Ms. Zerrougui for her report and the field visits she had carried out. Algeria said that the recruitment of child soldiers and the increasing number of child victims of armed conflicts around the world were appalling. The international community should focus on the situation of children in armed conflicts in order to prevent and punish the recruitment of child soldiers and the targeting of children during armed conflicts. A special focus should be given to the reintegration of child victims in post-conflict situations.

Thailand said that it had been actively engaged in the issue of child rights and protection and considered children in armed conflict as a very important issue, although the context of armed conflict did not apply to Thailand. It condemned all grave violations and crimes against children in such situations around the world and called upon all relevant parties to end all grave violations against children. Thailand supported the close cooperation among concerned agencies with child protection mandates. Child protection in all situations was the primary responsibility of every Government.

France said that the United Nations mechanism to protect children in armed conflict had made it possible to demobilize children and achieve considerable progress. However this mechanism had to be strengthened. France praised the Special Representative's initiative to put an end to child recruitment by 2016. Particular efforts had to be placed on non-state armed groups. What were the recommendations with respect to protection of schools against military use during armed conflict, and access to education?

Qatar attached particular importance to the protection of children. It had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995, and wished to accede to the Optional Protocol. The international community had to play a significant role in the protection of children. Qatar condemned violations against children, particularly in Palestine. They should not forget the suffering of children in Syria, whose rights were flouted. Attacks had been carried out against children, hospitals and schools.

Pakistan said that one of the founding principles of the United Nations Charter was to save successive generations from the scourge of wars. Meanwhile, wars and conflict continued to threaten the rights of children. This highlighted the continued importance of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Pakistan urged Ms. Zerrougui to develop mechanisms in cooperation with nation States to ameliorate the phenomenon of children in armed conflict. The legal parameters of the mandate had to be upheld.

Morocco welcomed the progress made in 2012 on the fate of children used in armed conflict. Morocco was among the first countries to outlaw the practice but the persistence of underage recruitment undermined the credibility of the international action. The use of schools and children as human shields was to be condemned. Morocco, however, recognized that it was difficult to cope with situations where children might voluntarily join armed groups, accompanied by their parents and with their support. What did the Special Representative of the Secretary-General recommend for dealing with such situations?

United States said it was deeply committed to eliminating the use of children in armed conflict and welcomed moves made by the Government of Yemen to stop the use of child soldiers. The United States urged the Government of Myanmar to root out the use of child soldiers after it had signed up to the action plan promoted by the international organizations. All forms of the use of children and schools as tools of war in Syria were condemned in the strongest terms.

Paraguay said that the killing and mutilation of children during armed conflicts, as well as the recruitment of child soldiers and the targeting of schools, could not be tolerated by the international community. The delegation informed the Council that, as a party to the Optional

Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Paraguay had submitted its initial report to the Committee. Paraguay reiterated its full support to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Australia said that the impacts of armed conflicts were horrific and children were amongst those who suffered the most. Australia was concerned about ongoing violations of children's rights during armed conflicts around the world, including through the recruitment of child soldiers. Children were directly affected through fighting, in particular through attacks on schools and hospitals. Their plight was often exacerbated by limitations or restrictions on humanitarian access. Australia would continue to work towards better protection of children's rights through its term on the United Nations Security Council.

Egypt said that the situation of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation, as well as the current status of the Syrian children, was expressive examples of the scourges that children witnessed at the time of armed conflict. Children were particularly vulnerable to the repercussions of armed conflicts that not only compromised their safety and physical and mental integrity but also seriously threatened the prospect of their future. Egypt welcomed the steps taken on the national, regional, and international levels in order to scale up the response towards the violations of the rights of the child in armed conflicts.

Slovenia, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that they were very alarmed by the reports about rape and other sexual violence committed in conflicts against children, especially girls. They fully supported efforts aimed at the prevention and the combating of sexual violence in conflict, as well as at ensuring accountability for crimes committed. How could the Council contribute to the international efforts to lessen the burden of this crisis for Syrian children?

Sierra Leone said that more had to be done in addressing the trauma associated with armed conflict. Rehabilitation of child combatants after conflict was a mammoth task which needed to be addressed, to ensure that these fighters did not revert to violence in the future. Eleven years after the armed conflict, Sierra Leone was still grappling with the problem of the rehabilitation of its over 8,000 child combatants. The children in armed conflicts, if they survived, would be the leaders of tomorrow and what future did they hope to have if their situation was not addressed today?

Georgia condemned the violence against civilians in Syria and deplored the death of more than 100,000 people, including children. Protection of the rights of children should be the highest priority for each Government and the entire international community. Unfortunately, the Georgian Government had been prevented from addressing the needs of children residing in the regions of the country that currently remained under Russia's military occupation. Georgia stressed the necessity to establish human rights monitoring mechanisms on the occupied territories of Georgia.

Poland said the threat of children becoming engaged in armed conflict was a growing threat. Growing up in an environment of hostility had an immense impact on the development of children. They were frequently sexually harassed by adults, and were hurt, maimed or killed in attacks on schools and hospitals at times of conflict. With the Convention on the Rights of the Child in mind, Poland called for all possible steps to be taken to eliminate the phenomenon of children in armed conflict.

Russian Federation said the United Nations' work in the area of children in armed conflict had to be made in a non-selective manner. For example, in Syria, the fact that the rebels, including Al Qaeda groupings, had forced minors into active participation in the conflict could not be overlooked by the international community. Geneva II was the only way forward and the threat of foreign intervention had to be countered.

United Kingdom said the Secretary-General's latest report on children and armed conflict noted a growth in the number of parties listed, including persistent perpetrators, and called for an end to impunity for those who committed violations against children. The transfer of Bosco Ntaganda to the International Criminal Court had shown that this was possible. The deployment of child protection officers to United Nations field missions should be prioritized. How would the Special Representative of the Secretary-General ensure momentum in the signing of action plans?

Syria said that parents in Syria were afraid of sending their children to schools in refugee camps, due to the lack of security. Armed groups supported by foreign countries had a distorted view of religion and subjected children to barbaric practices. Some schools

indoctrinated children with extremist views. These ugly violations of the rights of children were unacceptable. The Syrian Government welcomed the visit of Ms. Zerrougui in the country without any politicization.

Italy confirmed its long-standing commitment to protecting the rights of children affected by armed conflicts and remained particularly concerned about the negative trends depicted in the report. While considering accountability as one of the strongest forms of prevention, Italy learned with apprehension that investigations, prosecutions and trials continued to be rare. In this regard, Italy supported a more intense collaboration of the Security Council and the affected countries with the International Criminal Court.

Cuba, speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, thanked Ms. Zerrougui for her oral update and her efforts in promoting and protecting the rights of the child. The establishment of dialogues between parties to armed conflicts was a positive step. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States was alarmed by the disproportionate negative effect of armed conflicts on children, who were innocent victims of attacks. Children's rights to life, education and health had to be upheld during armed conflicts. Rehabilitation and reintegration into society had to be guaranteed in post-conflict situations.

Sri Lanka said that it was indeed a matter of concern that armed conflict continued to adversely affect the rights of children, violating not only their right to life and physical integrity, but also their basic economic, social and cultural rights. Sri Lanka was acutely conscious of the grave psycho-social repercussions of armed conflict on children. The policy of the Government in the reconciliation process was to treat all children formerly associated with armed groups primarily as victims and not as offenders, and hence not to subject them to legal proceeding but to rehabilitation.

Luxembourg was highly concerned about the situation of children living in regions where there was conflict, who were all too often victims of grave violations of their rights. It was important to make sure that the situation of children in armed conflict was systematically examined. Most States concerned by children in armed conflict had signed action plans and Luxembourg welcomed the initiative of the Special Representative aiming for their effective implementation by 2016. However, activities could not be restricted to Governments alone. The vast majority of violations were by non-state armed groups.

Cuba said that in various parts of the world children continued to be seriously affected by armed conflict. In that context, the observance of the precepts stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child continued to be important as a benchmark and framework to address these problems. There was a need to do away with double standards, expressed by some Governments in terms of protecting civilians. Nothing justified the bombing of cities and populated areas, which with the pretext of ensuring humanitarian action or protecting civilians, resulted in the deaths of more innocent girls and boys, and destroyed schools, homes and hospitals.

Kuwait said that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's target of ending the use of child soldiers by 2016 was welcomed. Kuwait was fully committed to the principles of ending the use of minors in the military and its laws confirmed this. Indoctrinated children must be rescued and treated medically and psychologically. Kuwait was currently drafting an integrated law on the rights of the child and this would only add to the international resolve on the matter.

Belgium welcomed the mainstreaming of children's rights in the search for peace, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's contribution to the international dialogue during her visits to Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon. Belgium was appalled by the plight of children in Syria and called for action. States that had not ratified the relevant section on the Convention of the Rights of the Child were strongly encouraged to do so under the recommendation of the Special Representative.

Slovakia said it had been among the leading States to bring about the Third Optional Protocol of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and it supported the Special Representative's global initiative to end child recruitment by Government forces by 2016. Slovakia was committed to the further mainstreaming of this topic. In pursuing her efforts, did the Special Representative envisage any concrete measures to ensure closer cooperation among relevant thematic and geographic Special Procedures?

Switzerland welcomed the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty and called on all States that had not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Demobilized child soldiers were often traumatized and their efficient reintegration, as well as the

prevention of their recruitment, needed specific measures. Switzerland condemned any attack against schools, which could amount to war crimes. What specific measures were envisaged by the Special Representative to guarantee children's right to education during armed conflicts?

South Sudan said that the problem of child soldiers needed a holistic approach to protect children during armed conflicts. South Sudan had launched a strategy to demilitarize child soldiers and reintegrate them into civilian life. South Sudan was today free of child soldiers but still in the process of reintegrating the former child soldier into society. How could the mandate of the Special Representative assist in the reintegration of former child soldiers?

Chad confirmed that the Government was currently intensifying its efforts to put an end to the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Chad's National Army, in conformity with an Action Plan signed in 2011 and adopted in 2013. Since 2007, 1,030 child soldiers were demobilized with the assistance of UNICEF, Care International and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Chad's Government was currently working on the rehabilitation and social reintegration of former child soldiers.

Republic of Korea remained concerned that grave violations against children continued to occur day after day in many parts of the world, particularly in Syria. Future generations of Syrians were being denied access to their rights to learn as many schools were misused by conflicting parties. Holding violators accountable was critical to preventing abuse against children in armed conflict. Time-bound action plans and their seamless implementation was the key to ending violations against children, and a sharper focus should be given to addressing the problem of persistent perpetrators.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation shared the concern as to the lack of respect of basic fundamental rights of children in armed conflict. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation also shared the concern of the Special Representative with respect to the recruitment of children and their integration into armed groups. The international community needed to develop legal prevention mechanisms at the local, national and international levels. Also of concern was the issue of impunity. The perpetrators and those responsible for recruiting children in armed groups had to be held accountable.

Palestine said children continued to be unjustly affected by armed conflict and had their basic rights violated. Systematic and consistent violations happened most recently in areas under occupation. As of July this year there were 195 Palestinian children in Israeli prisons. In detention and during interrogation, children had reported being beaten, kicked and forced into signing confessions, among other violations. These children were deprived of education, healthcare and access to justice. What particular measures needed to be taken to ensure the protection of Palestinian children living under occupation, in accordance with international standards?

Nigeria thanked the Special Representative for her excellent work. Nigeria condemned in the strongest terms the use of children in armed conflict and echoed the call that all legal frameworks for child protection must be upheld. Conflicts could be restricted to internationally recognised rules and the use of child soldiers clearly fell outside these rules. Nigeria called on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali to adhere to the action plans they signed with respect to child soldiers. The United Nations must translate its words to actions.

Maldives said that Governments needed to put in place national legislation and accountability mechanisms to end impunity and ensure that violators of children's rights during conflicts were held accountable. In applauding the Special Representative's work, the Maldives believed that it was crucial to now develop holistic reintegration programmes for affected children to give them the best chance in life. Noting that the Secretary-General's "list of shame" had on it persistent offenders, what novel ways did the Special Representative have in mind to deal with them?

Germany welcomed the active work of the Special Representative and maintained its support for her mandate. Children affected by armed conflict were robbed of their childhood and deprived of human rights. Germany would always uphold the rights of children to be children and not instruments of conflict. What was the Special Representative's evaluation of the resolution that added schools and hospitals as additional triggers for listing in the Secretary-General's list? What were good strategies for reaching out to non-State actors involved in using children in armed conflict?

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) welcomed the new campaign by the Office of the Special Representative with the support of the Secretary-General, which aimed at ending children's association with State armed forces in armed conflict by 2016. Conducting joint country visits had become standard practice for UNICEF and the Special Representative. During the last two years, joint missions were undertaken to South Sudan, Yemen, Syria and Chad, among others. UNICEF had supported the development of new standards on child protection, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Holy See said that the scourge of the recruitment of child soldiers continued in various countries. It was urgent to stop recruitment by both governmental and non-governmental groups, so that these children may be able to overcome the difficulties of their environment and have access to education and a normal family life. There was a link between extreme poverty and social deprivation and the forced conscription of children in armed groups. International law provided special protection for children, but the gap between legislation and implementation remained very wide.

Latvia noted with great concern that grave violations against children continued to be committed during on-going conflicts on a daily basis. Violations of the principles of international humanitarian law deprived children from the special protection to which they were entitled according to international law. What steps should the international community take to tackle the problem of persistent perpetrators, in particular, non-State armed groups? Could the Special Representative elaborate more about the current challenges of rehabilitation and integration of children formerly associated with armed groups?

Democratic Republic of the Congo said that the recurring military activities in the eastern part of the country had as a consequence the recruitment of children into foreign and national armed groups, rape and use of children as sex slaves, and their use in mines to the profit of multinationals and mafia groups that exploited the riches of the country. Today the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo applied the provisions of the Second Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the letter.

Portugal joined the call for an end to impunity for violations of the rights of the child in conflict situations and the need to effectively employ the mechanisms of international justice. On education, focusing in particular on the terrible educational challenges arising from the conflict in Syria, according to data published by the United Nations, schools and educators had been targeted during the fighting. Educational facilities were currently being used for other purposes and the psychological and material costs of the disruption in education were incalculable.

Venezuela expressed concern at the lack of opportunities, meaning that in many cases children voluntarily joined armed groups. Venezuela had amended its legislation to ensure the comprehensive protection of boys, girls and adolescents. Venezuela reaffirmed that there were no armed groups operating on its territory, neither had there been cases of participation of children in armed conflict whatsoever in the country. The State ensured and guaranteed that persons that opted to engage in military service could continue and complete their studies.

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