

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Jan Grauls- in his capacity as Chair of the Country Specific Configuration for the Central African Republic of the Peacebuilding Commission

**Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict - 30th Meeting
Introduction of the Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of children and armed conflict in the CAR (S/2011/241)**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

2 May 2011

Mr. President,

Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in the presentation of this Report of the Secretary General. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding dedication of the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Ms. Coomaraswamy. I also welcome the presence of my dear colleague, Ambassador Poukré.

Mr. President,

The recent Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Central African Republic provides an excellent overview of this worrying crisis. As Ms. Coomaraswamy has just reminded us, many Central African children are not only victims of serious violations of international law, but also of a lack of attention, capacities and resources deployed to address them. Indeed, the Central African Republic remains, despite all efforts, an "aid orphan". As also noted by the Special Representative, the situation of children in CAR is inextricably linked to the country's peacebuilding challenges. Thus, the virtual absence of the State over a large part of the territory creates a security vacuum, which in some areas is exploited by rebel groups and road bandits. People are often left to their own fate and do not enjoy access to the most basic social services.

Faced with these challenges, how can the Peacebuilding Commission contribute to the sustainable improvement of living conditions of children and the general population in the Central African Republic? Our answer is threefold. The first element concerns the restoration of the physical security of the Central African population through Security Sector Reform and activities related to the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of politico-military groups. In this regard, the Commission is committed to promoting the release, protection and reintegration into society of all children recruited by armed groups. The second element of our work focuses on restoring legal security through activities in the field

of Good Governance and the Rule of Law. Our objectives in this area include the fight against impunity, particularly for crimes against women and children. Finally, the third element concerns activities in the realm of reintegration and revitalization of communities affected by conflict. It is clear that the actions taken in this third area will also contribute to the betterment of the situation of Central African children. Mr. President, In order to support the efforts of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, I have given this issue special attention during my recent field mission (6 to 10 April 2011). Accordingly, I have raised the fate of children who suffer from the daily consequences of conflict, insecurity, and forced displacement with each of my interlocutors, including the President of the Republic. To assess the situation, I undertook a visit to Batangafo. This town in the northwestern prefecture of Ouham is still under control of several rebel movements. And like in many communities far from the capital, the situation of children there remains tragic. For lack of resources and capabilities, the state school system there is virtually nonexistent. Children are being taught by parents who have been trained in a few weeks to the role of "teacher-parents." But beyond the lack of capacity, insecurity in this border region with Chad is a major barrier to access to education. Thus, violence between armed groups and herder-farmer tensions have led to the displacement of populations. This displacement prevents many children from going to school. General living conditions are equally precarious. People depend entirely on international NGOs for the provision of basic social services. In comparison to the immense needs of the population, resources available to these NGOs remain inadequate. In addition, some roads linking Batangafo to other localities in the region are frequently interrupted by sometimes serious security incidents. These make access to affected populations impossible. However, by the standards of many Central African children, the fate of those of Batangafo probably seems enviable. The field presence of motivated and highly competent humanitarian actors - including Doctors Without Borders, the Danish Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee and UNICEF - contributes to the stability of the situation. It also allows the implementation of child protection projects, funded in part by the Peacebuilding Fund. In contrast, in some less secure or inaccessible areas, no one is even present to witness the extent of the problem. Mr. President, Beyond my visit to Batangafo, my exchanges with the Government and the UN system in Bangui have allowed me to convey five key messages related to the content of the Report of the Secretary-General: The first is the need – also pointed out by the Special Representative of Secretary General – to establish and implement action plans for each individual armed group listed in the Annex to the Report. In this context, I found that the national authorities were open to this approach, although it requires close, step by step, guidance.

Secondly, I have had the opportunity to talk with the Prime Minister about the launch of the work of the National Council on Child Protection (Conseil National pour la Protection de l'Enfance), an issue that also appears in the Report of the Secretary General. The Prime Minister assured me that the launch can be expected soon, as the last institutional barriers have now been removed.

Thirdly, my audience with the President of the Republic allowed me to draw his attention to the consequences of the absence of a peace agreement with the Convention of the Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), particularly in the field of humanitarian access. This topic was already raised by Ms. Coomaraswamy. I note with hope that since my return, the political leadership of this movement has reiterated its willingness to sign a final peace agreement with the Central African Government.

Fourth, concerning the "reintegration" issue, my visit has allowed me to talk to actors in the field about the prospects for implementing the strategy aimed at revitalizing communities affected by conflict. The programs for long-term socio-economic reintegration of former child combatants, of which the Special Representative has stressed the importance, fit perfectly into this strategy. Finally, and in direct connection with one of the key points cited by Ms. Coomaraswamy, I have encouraged the Special Representative of the Secretary General in CAR, Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, her team and the humanitarian actors to reinvigorate the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, which they have agreed to do.

Mr. President, I am about to conclude on a hopeful note. My mission has allowed me to announce - with her consent - the visit to the Central African Republic in 2011 of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Taking advantage of this impulse, I urged the relevant actors to establish and implement a roadmap of activities ahead of the visit. In addition, the Central African Republic Configuration is currently preparing a Donor Roundtable for the CAR with UNDP and the World Bank. This Roundtable will allow among other to raise the necessary resources for improving the living conditions of children in the CAR. I therefore hope that this twofold impetus will be the first step in increasing attention and support for the forgotten children of the Central African Republic.

Thank you, Mr. President.