

Statement by H.E. Ms Karen Van Vlierberge,
Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative

to the United Nations Security Council

Children and Armed Conflict - Open Debate

New York, 2 August 2019

Mr President,

Belgium is in complete alignment with the declarations made by the EU and the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict. We would like to thank everyone who took part for their valuable contributions.

This open debate marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1882. There has indeed been some considerable progress throughout the last decade.

However, this year's Annual Report indicates a number of grave, unprecedented violations committed against children since monitoring began. Belgium is deeply concerned about the particularly high number of child victims, and asks all parties to take measures to protect children, in accordance with the principles of distinction and proportionality. The increase in prolonged conflicts around the world, including lengthy wars, is causing more significant indirect damage and affecting more and more children. The shifting of conflicts towards urban areas and the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated zones have devastating effects on boys and girls. Belgium is particularly alarmed by the practice of refusing humanitarian aid as a weapon of war, as it prevents children from having access to vital assistance.

At the same time, these data on grave violations committed against children are regarded as **underestimates**, due to a lack of access, stigmatisation and fear of reprisals. Our work is far from over, my dear colleagues.

Mr President,

In its capacity as President of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Belgium has worked to bring about a consensus on two series of conclusions. The first regards grave violations of children's rights in Syria, and the second, in Myanmar. Unity on the part of the Security Council on these two situations is a strong signal.

In its role as President of the Working Group, Belgium supports the mandate and work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. In this respect, we are mobilising every instrument at our disposal. We have organised joint meetings with sanctions committees, emphasised the monitoring of conclusions that have been previously adopted by the Working Group and also organised chauffeur-driven vehicles for field missions before the renewal of their mandate. We would like to finally integrate the aspect of children and armed conflict into the Security Council's overall work. We propose that the Special Representative be permitted to regularly speak before the Council about national situations, as was the case with Yemen and the CAR.

The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) of the UN is vital to this mandate. The Annual Report by the SG, founded on the basis of verified information, is a fundamental tool for engaging in a dialogue with parties involved in conflict, and for obtaining concrete commitments, particularly through National Action Plans. Such an approach, founded on factual data, is essential to maintaining the **credibility** and **independence of the CAAC mandate**. It is also the best way to directly bring about **actual change** in favour of children affected by conflict.

Mr President,

The efficient execution of the Children and Armed Conflict agenda is a responsibility shared by us all. That implies maintaining a specialised capacity to protect children within the contexts of UN peacekeeping operations and political missions. It also implies according priority to the handling of concerns regarding the protection of children.

We should not forget prevention either. It is within the framework of prevention that we need to work in favour of the long-term global reintegration of children, by investing in programmes that provide individual support and that meet the needs of protection, psychosocial support and education. Experience has shown that children who have taken part in such programmes become less vulnerable to re-recruitment by armed groups. Thanks to reintegration, boys and girls have the possibility of making a life for themselves, far from conflict, and of looking towards the future without being haunted by the past.

Though prevention is obviously preferable, Belgium would also like to bring to mind the need for bringing those responsible for war crimes and other grave violations of international human rights law to justice, including, if need be, through full cooperation with the International Criminal Court. Thank you, Mr President.