

**Security Council Open Debate**  
**On**  
**Children and Armed Conflict**

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**Statement before the Security Council**

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by

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Monsieur le Président, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates and colleagues,

I would like to begin by congratulating the Security Council for the bold initiative, Security Council resolution 1612, which seeks to protect children in armed conflict. I would like to express my particular gratitude to the French Chairperson, His Excellency Jean-Marc de La Sablière, for his active and groundbreaking leadership on this issue

As we watch events unfold in the Middle East, we are reminded that children often bear the brunt of physical and psychological trauma caused by armed conflict. It is the desire to protect children that united the world one year ago when the Security Council passed this landmark resolution. Security Council resolution 1612 is novel in a number of ways that give it prominence;

1. It is a testament that the Security Council is committed to going beyond words, to specific action in endorsing a monitoring and reporting mechanism. This mechanism, clearly designating a system for reporting on grave violations against children from the field level through to the Secretary-General's Office has been set up in order to address the situations of children in conflict-affected areas more diligently.
2. Through this resolution, the Security Council also expresses its intention to combat impunity through possible targeted measures against repeat violators of children's rights
3. The Security Council has also called for specific action plans to stop the recruitment and use of children as soldiers; giving parties a framework to ensure compliance.

4. The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and its bi-monthly meeting schedule ensures that the issue of children and peace and security is actively seized by the Council throughout the year.

Mr. President,

In the past year, much has been accomplished on this ambitious agenda for children. The Security Council Working Group has met on four occasions and has set their program of work for the year. The United Nations system, including UNICEF, DPKO and OHCHR, and its partners have worked diligently, on a tight deadline, to bring this mechanism to fruition in pilot countries; and the first report, on the Democratic Republic of Congo was submitted to the Security Council Working Group in June of this year. The NGO community is very much engaged in supporting the monitoring and reporting agenda and civil society in affected countries are gearing up to strengthen their interface on monitoring and reporting. Finally, we are encouraged that other “destinations for action”, the Human Rights Commission and the International Criminal Court, are addressing the issue of violations of children’s rights in conflict in an effective manner.

However, though the groundswell of support for this resolution and the monitoring and reporting exercise in particular has been strong, and the situation for children in Sierra Leone, Burundi, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo has improved markedly, children continue to suffer. Over 250,000 children continue to be exploited as child soldiers by armed forces and groups around the world. Tens of thousands of girls are being subjected to rape and other forms

of sexual violence. Abductions of children are becoming more systematic and widespread. Since 2003, over 14 million children have been forcibly displaced within and outside their home countries, and between 8,000 and 10,000 children are killed or maimed each year by landmines.

I would like to share with you the story of “Abou”, a boy from Sierra Leone, abducted by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) from his school in Kenema. He was only 11 years old at the time. Four years later, Abou had become a killer - - a known and feared commander of the RUF rebels - - one of the youngest. He was demobilized by the UN when he was 15, receiving amnesty for atrocities committed during the conflict in Sierra Leone. And although his community accepted Abou back, it was clear that many in the community were still afraid of the boy and he was quite isolated. Six months after being re-united with his family Abou disappeared. Three years later, Abou was among the children disarmed and demobilized in Cote d’Ivoire. He told a story of leaving his community in Sierra Leone because he was “haunted by bad spirits”, and of being re-recruited to fight for LURD in Liberia. He later went as a mercenary to Cote d’Ivoire together with other LURD fighters. In an interview with UN staff, Abou explained, “I left because what I really know how to do well is fight and be a soldier, but there is peace in Sierra Leone”.

The story illustrates a terrible tragedy: of the trauma of children and the communities that they have been forced to brutalize; of the tremendous challenges to successful healing and reintegration of children in the aftermath of conflict; and, of the recycling of children into conflicts that shift across borders. Unfortunately, there are far too many Abous out there, and we are compelled to protect them.

In this vein, we await the Security Council Working Group's deliberations and recommendations to the Security Council on the report of the situation of children affected by armed conflict in the DRC. The initial phase of the setting up of a monitoring and reporting mechanism is now over. It is now time for the Council to take effective action against repeat offenders. As today is an important milestone for Security Council Resolution 1612, the response of the council to its first substantive report on children and armed conflict presents a key opportunity to set in place measures to spare more children the fate of "Abou". The world is watching and the children are watching. We must not fail them.

Mr. President,

The United Nations system and its partners have risen to the challenge of responding fully and capably in this first phase of implementation of Security Council; resolution 1612. We have been encouraged by the response of actors at the local, national, regional and international levels. Many partners and stakeholders are cooperating with each other to make Security Council resolution 1612 a success for children. My Office takes this opportunity to thank all of them for their diligence and their commitment.

Now that this first phase of implementation is coming to an end, it is time for the UN system and the Security Council to look beyond the limited scope of the first phase and to broaden the geographical scope of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to all situations of concern where grave violations are perpetrated against children in armed conflict. In addition, the international

community must begin to look at long-term solutions for children affected by armed conflict. I stand by my UN agency colleagues and NGO partners in advocating that, to be truly adequate in responding to needs of children affected by conflict, “band aid” solutions are not sufficient and long-term developmental responses that will result in meaningful re-integration of these children, including access to education and alternative livelihoods should be developed. These should be the foundations of concerted international action and a sustained commitment to the provision of resources and technical assistance for these children.

Monsieur le Président

This month is also the 10<sup>th</sup> –year anniversary of the Machel Report on Children and Armed Conflict, which gave birth to a new consciousness in the United Nations about the plight of children affected by armed conflict. In this sense I find it useful to go back to the words of Graça Machel herself to remind us of the reason we are meeting today:

*“We cannot waste our precious children. Not another one, not another day.*

*It is long past time for us to act on their behalf - - the impact of conflict on children is*

*everyone’s responsibility and it must be everyone’s concern.”*