

Investing in our global future by protecting children affected by conflict

Thank you very much, Madam President. And I'd like to pass on our thanks also to his excellency the Foreign Minister for being here today to conduct this debate. And I join others in thanking all our briefers, particularly Ms Kamara and Mr Awan, for their very compelling testimonies and for sharing those with the Security Council this morning.

I want to add my voice to those congratulating Peru on a very successful presidency and welcoming Poland to their presidency and pledging UK support. I welcome our Chinese colleague, who we had the pleasure of seeing earlier. And I want to thank the Kuwaiti representative for joining our attention to that very important anniversary.

I think what we've heard today, Madam President shows that everybody has been very much moved by the bleak picture of the impact of armed conflict on children that's conveyed in the Secretary-General's report for 2018. And I won't repeat many of the very pertinent points that have been made round the table. It's very clear that this issue of children in armed conflict is something that unites the Council and I suspect it unites the whole membership. So we ought to hold on to that as we try and find a way to enhance all the measures we've taken.

If I may, I'll use this session to focus on six ideas for further action to reverse some of the incredibly worrying trends of 2018.

First, and at the heart of all the violations against children set out in the report, is the widespread disregard we're seeing for international law; not just by non-state armed groups, but by governments. We all know the situation in Syria, in Idlib. We need to have an urgent conversation about the international legal framework, how to strengthen adherence to International Humanitarian Law, but also about accountability for those who disregard it. And in that connection, Madam President, it's very welcome that the Polish presidency will also be doing a debate on IHL and another very important anniversary.

Secondly, levels of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in conflict remain prevalent and too high. In Somalia, for example, sexual violence was committed against hundreds of girls and boys by both state and non-state actors. In South Sudan, sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon of war in concert with abductions, although we welcome the willingness of the government in engaging with the UN to develop a comprehensive action plan on all six violations there. In November this year, the UK will have the pleasure of hosting the Global Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. The conference will focus on addressing the root causes of sexual violence, tackling stigma and strengthening justice for survivors and holding

perpetrators to account. We also hope that it will be able to launch a code ensuring that signatories uphold international standards and best practice when dealing with sexual violence. And I hope many of the countries represented in this room and our colleagues from the UN will be able to join us for that event.

Thirdly, and as was very clear from the testimony of Ms Kamara and Mr Awan, we need to improve approaches to reintegrating children who've been recruited and used by the parties to conflict. In situations like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where over 2000 children were separated from the parties to conflict in 2018, this means we need to increase funding for reintegration programs. But it also means we need to improve the availability of psychosocial and mental health support, education, vocational training, jobs and support to the community. And I think that came over really clearly from both by civil society briefers today. For our part, we are looking forward to the outcomes of the studies commissioned by the Global Coalition for Reintegration, of which we are a member and a financial supporter.

Fourthly, we should strengthen our response to denial of humanitarian access. The report states that incidents of denial of access decreased in 2018. It tells us little, however, about the extent of the impact on children. In Yemen, for example, the impact was clearly devastating. And in Myanmar, the UK remains deeply concerned about the lack of humanitarian access – and I take this opportunity to call on the authorities in Myanmar to honour fully the MOU signed with the UN in June 2019. As a first stage, we would hope that children and armed conflict reporting might be able to provide more information on impact here. And looking forward, we should look further at how we make denial of humanitarian access a trigger for listing in the annual report.

Fifthly, Madam President, member states should do more to embed child protection mechanisms into their domestic systems. I was very interested in what Mr Awan had to say about this in particular and the Executive Director. We urge member states to join us in signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and in endorsing initiatives such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and Commitments, and Vancouver Principles.

We ourselves, Madam President, have provided an extra 2.3 billion pounds, so over \$3 billion dollars, for mental health care support, and this includes extra funding for children. In June of this year, we were able to launch Child Mental Health Prevention Plan. And I know our royal family Princes Harry and William have launched a mental health line called Shout. So we take very seriously this aspect of the problem.

Sixthly, we should remain vigilant in our monitoring of ongoing conflict situations where there have been unlawful attacks on education, including in the Anglophone region of Cameroon and in eastern Ukraine.

And finally, I want to express our admiration and respect for the UN's own work to the SRSG, for the monitoring and reporting personnel, the child protection staff, and their partners on the ground for the tireless work they

do at great personal risk to themselves, and as we've heard today, in very harrowing circumstances. You deserve our full support. And I'd like to end by recording what the Executive Director said about looking after the children being an investment in our global future; I don't think there can be a truer word for that.

Thank you, Madam President.