

Speech: Protecting children today prevents conflict tomorrow

Thank you very much indeed, Mr Prime Minister, and let me join others in welcoming Sweden to her presidency and to thank our Russian colleagues for their stewardship during the past month. We're also very pleased Mr Prime Minister that you have convened this debate today. It is very important for the Council to focus on the protection of children as a key element of conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

Like others, I would like to pay tribute to Yenny's own insights into the effect of conflict. What she said about addressing the root causes is a theme that has been picked up by many speakers today. And of course I thank the Executive Director and the Special Representative for their efforts but also for their efforts internationally and on the ground to protect and prevent children from being the victims of armed conflict.

In this regard Mr President, the UK joins others in welcoming the publication of the Secretary-General's Annual Report. Thanks to the courageous and committed work of monitoring and reporting teams all over the world, the report continues to produce a reliable, evidence-based set of metrics which this Council, the UN and others need in order to take effective action. But it also shows an alarming trend: In 2017 the number of both find violations against children in conflict increased by a shocking 35 percent. It is vital that the Council addresses this and I welcome this debate today. Mr President, we've heard a lot about the next generation. We were able to hear some very good news from Cote d'Ivoire and I was interested in those experiences and also on what is happening in Nigeria.

But as the Council saw for itself on its mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar, there are too many children who bear the physical scars of armed conflict. We saw children amputees, a poignant and disturbing reminder of quite what conflict does to children. We need to take better care, Mr President, of the next generation so that they can take care, in turn, of their societies. There is no single answer to how we do this and we've had a lot of ideas put forward today. I won't repeat those. The United Kingdom shares many of the suggestions that were put forward today but I would like to concentrate, if I may, on one particular action and one that can have an overwhelmingly positive effect on improving stability and reducing conflict. This is a Sustainable Development Goal number four; making sure that everybody gets a quality education. This was something that Yenny but also a number of Permanent Representatives have drawn attention to.

As we all know, women play a vital role in the prevention and resolution of conflict and peace-building. This means also in peace talks and in re-establishing the fabric of a recovering society. And yet we know that conflict restricts access to education and it restricts access to girls' education in particular. So we should see Mr President, what we can do to ameliorate that.

Reintegration program should include education as a core component. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes should be age and gender sensitive so that they meet the needs of all children. And we need to ensure that, worldwide, girls receive the education that allows them to participate fully in governance, towards the achievement of durable peace security and reconciliation and hence ultimately towards conflict prevention.

In 2016, a staggeringly small amount of humanitarian aid was invested in education, a mere 1.4 percent. It goes without saying that this is not enough. We should all do more to place education at the heart of our approach to security and development. For our part, the United Kingdom is committed to providing educational support to millions of children around the world in need of education in emergencies and protracted crises. In Syria and the wider region, following on from UNICEF's No Lost Generation initiative, we allocated \$110 million to provide protection, trauma care and education for children affected by the crisis in Syria and the wider region. We are the largest bilateral donor to Education Cannot Wait and we're committing \$40 million this year to support conflict affected children in Uganda.

And finally, as other speakers have noted, we need to ensure that schools themselves are protected. Whilst International Humanitarian Law is the primary basis for the protection of schools and education facilities, the Safe Schools declaration which the United Kingdom has recently endorsed reflects our commitment to the provision and access to high quality education in humanitarian situations and protracted crises. We align ourselves with the statement that will be delivered by Argentina on behalf of all those who endorsed the declaration and we would like to take this opportunity to call on all of our international partners to follow suit.

As set out in the first line of the UN Charter, and much quoted today; our goal is to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. We need to begin with our children. They are absolutely vital to a better future.