

STATEMENT

by

H. E. Mr. Michal Mlynár

**Permanent Representative of Slovakia
to the United Nations**

**Open debate of the Security Council
on
Children and Armed Conflicts**

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Madam President,

Slovakia aligns itself with the statement which will be delivered by the distinguished representative of the European Union and with statement to be delivered by the delegation of Norway on behalf of the group of Endorsing States of the Safe Schools Declaration and one that was delivered earlier by the delegation of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflicts.

At the outset I would like to thank the Secretary-General António Guterres for his timely briefing and recent report covering the impacts of armed conflicts on children in 2016, further I would like to specially thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba for her remarkable tireless efforts focusing on Children affected by armed conflicts and finally Mr. Mubin Shaikh for his briefing. I would also like to thank the French presidency for convening this timely open debate.

Madam President,

Slovakia is deeply committed to the protection of all children, in particular the ones affected by armed conflicts. We have been championing the adoption of Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure in 2011, signed by 36 states so far. Therefore, we call on other member states to ratify this Optional Protocol, allowing individual children to submit complaints regarding specific violations of their rights under the Convention and its first two optional protocols.

This year, in January, we marked 10th anniversary of the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. A month later, in February we marked 20th anniversary of the UN General Assembly resolution 51/77 creating a mandate dedicated to improve the protection of children affected by conflict. These documents were pivotal in galvanizing the interest of the global community in the agenda of children and armed conflicts, delivering tangible and measurable results.

In these 20 years, a tremendous amount of work has been done. Tens of thousands of child soldiers have been released, almost 30 Action Plans have been signed with parties to conflict, leading to the situation that recruitment or use of child soldiers no longer exists in 5 countries where it existed before. But reading both reports of the

Secretary-General and Special Representative Gamba, we must acknowledge that we have still not reached desired results.

Mr. President,

Less than 3 weeks ago, we heard an eerie testimony of Joy Bishara, one of the 276 schoolgirls kidnapped from a Secondary School in the town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria. The civilian character of schools is supposed to be the guarantee of their sacredness. Attacks on schools, their damage or destruction, together with threats, attacks on or abductions of scholars and academics undermine the right to education and have far-reaching consequences. The main purpose of these attacks is to spread fear. Fear to receive education, because all these perpetrators know, that education and knowledge are cornerstones of progress.

Education helps to eliminate regional inequality; education provides tools for both girls and boys to move forward, towards a better future for their families, communities and countries. On the other hand, lack of education increases the risk of radicalization and recruitment of children. Their place is not on the battlefield, their tools are not bombs or firearms, they should be at their school-desks, with a pen and a book in their hands. That is the natural set-up for children, all children, and we have to do our best in order to achieve it.

We urge all state and non-state parties to respect the International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law. All perpetrators should be named and held accountable for violating the rights of children. It is an important step and therefore I would like to commend the Secretary-General for providing in his report a list of parties, which have committed one or more violations against children. We should work with these parties, prepare, sign and implement Action Plans, in order to eradicate this malpractice. We should hold accountable recruiters, kidnappers, sexual offenders and all other perpetrators for their crimes against children in a court of law. We should support the global consensus to end military recruitment and use of children and promote the Straight-18 standard.

Last but not least, we should all engage in the release and sustainable reintegration of children, after their terrible experiences in recruitment or other violations. We must keep in mind, that first of all, they are victims, in need of specialized psychological and social assistance and therefore we must provide them with

professional help, support and education. Only that way, they will be able to resume their lives, focus on future, while not being affected by their past.

Madam President,

Violence against children, their placement or even active role in the conflicts terribly affects them, but us, the human kind, as well. After all, children are our future, and we are obliged to do our utmost to provide the best possible prospects for them. Otherwise, the price to pay will be too high.

In conclusion I would like to recall one of my earlier visits to South Sudan, to Juba, where through our development cooperation project we have been supporting a vaccination campaign, to the neediest children. To those, who suffer on the daily bases, who are not only poor, but really experience hunger and are affected in their everyday lives. It is our obligation to the children in places like South Sudan and many others to do more, in order to provide for them what we otherwise consider normal.

I would like to end by quoting former UN SG Ban Ki-moon. *“Education promotes equality and lifts people out of poverty. It teaches children how to become good citizens. Education is not just for a privileged few, it is for everyone. It is a fundamental human right.”*

I thank you Madam President