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Security Council
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SECURITY COUNCIL STRONGLY CONDEMNS CONTINUED USE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT;
NOTES PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING MECHANISM TO MONITOR, ELIMINATE PRACTICE

Secretary-General Says Focus Shifting to Providing Real Protection; Special Representative, UNICEF Head Also Address Council in Day-Long Debate

Strongly condemning the continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of international law, the Security Council today reiterated its commitment to address the widespread impact of armed conflict on children and its determination to ensure continued implementation of its resolution 1612 (2005) and all previous resolutions on children and armed conflict, as it held a day-long debate on the issue.

In a statement read out by its President for November, Luis Chavez (Peru), the Council also welcomed steps by national, international and “mixed” criminal courts and tribunals against those who are alleged to have committed grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict in violation of applicable international law.

Taking note of the positive developments in implementing resolution 1612 (2005), including the first reports of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the activity of its working group on children and armed conflicts, the Council reiterated its invitation to relevant States affected by armed conflict that are not yet involved in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to join it on a voluntary basis. It also called again on relevant parties to armed conflict that have not already done so to implement, as a matter of priority, concrete time-bound action plans to halt recruitment and use of children in violation of applicable international law, as called for in Council resolution 1539 (2005).

The council also requested the Secretary-General to submit a further progress report on the implantation of resolution 1612, by February of 2008.

Opening today’s debate, Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that, despite significant progress, the international community had only begun to “scratch the surface” in addressing the issue of children and armed conflict. Expressing hope that the Council would consolidate the gains made and move forward to cover all situations of concern and all grave violations, he said the tangible gains of the past few years showed that, with political will in the Council, it was
possible to improve the lives of millions of children trapped in situations of armed conflict.

Since 1998, when the first Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict had begun its work and the Council had held its first open debate on the subject, the issue had gained greater visibility, he added. The Council’s annual debates had demonstrated a “gathering will” to act against those who recruited child soldiers. Today, the international community was shifting its focus from the elaboration of standards to the provision of real protection. In the past year alone, there had been encouraging signals that impunity for crimes against children would no longer be tolerated. Political and practical momentum must be maintained and a close eye kept on situations of concern.

Presenting the Secretary-General’s annual report on the issue, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, agreed that, while a great deal had been done in formulating standards and receiving commitments, actual implementation was far from satisfactory. The parties involved should be made aware of the consequences if they did not live up to their commitments. Reports by United Nations country teams in Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Nepal had been taken as a starting point for the activities of the Council’s working group, which had succeeded in defining a “toolkit” of possible Council actions.

Several grave violations deserved particular attention, she stressed, including the increasing number of reports of sexual violence as an instrument of war. The “recycling” of child soldiers within conflict zones was also of concern. Children demobilized in Sierra Leone, for instance, resurfaced in Côte d’Ivoire, and there were similar movements in the African Great Lakes region. In that regard, demobilization and reintegration programmes should be made more effective.

Calling for a renewed commitment to children impacted by armed conflict, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Ann Veneman noted that, while the Council was meeting today, hundreds of thousands of children were beginning their day as child soldiers fighting adult wars. The reasons for the conflicts were complex, but the result was simple: children bore the brunt of those conflicts. With the Secretary-General’s report detailing information on six grave violations of children’s rights perpetrated by over 40 parties in more than 20 conflict-affected areas, it was clear that violations against children continued in defiance of international law. By naming the parties, however, the Council had demonstrated its determination to match words with deeds.

Describing new areas of concern, she noted that, with some 119 children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory killed this year -- more than twice the number of deaths registered in 2005 -- it was time to scale up protection and support to children in that fractured region. In Chad, the ongoing fighting between Government forces and the armed opposition, and the presence of Sudanese rebels had led to tremendous insecurity, putting children at particular risk. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she had listened to first-hand accounts of routine rape used as a weapon against young girls. When children were uprooted and traumatized by armed conflict, education could play a key role in bringing stability and security back into their lives, she said.

Also addressing the Council, Gabriel Oling Olang, District Manager for Save the Children in Uganda’s northern region, agreed that a focus on education had been key to successful
interventions. Proper education was a proven method for increasing children’s resistance to forced recruitment and exploitation, such as forced prostitution, and it also imbued them with important life skills, such as landmine awareness, protection from HIV/AIDS, hygiene and disease prevention. Education should be funded and programmed as part of every humanitarian response, he said.

In the ensuing discussion, speakers agreed that, while significant steps had been taken to address the issue of children in armed conflict, further efforts and better coordinated actions were needed to move forward the process that started 10 years ago. In that regard, many speakers welcomed the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the setting up of the Security Council working group as two positive outcomes of the adoption of resolution 1612, which had provided new impetus to the Council’s efforts to protect children caught up in situations of armed conflict. Speakers also called on Governments to adopt concrete time-bound action plans, with Benin’s representative noting that parties who presented action plans but did not implement them were just as much to be reproached as those without action plans.

Finland’s representative, on behalf of the European Union, joined other delegations in expressing concern at the escalation of violence in the Middle East, which had resulted in the lost lives of several hundred children and the untold suffering of many others. Outlining other areas of concern, she noted the recruitment of children in Sri Lanka, as well as in Somalia, where a long period without a central government had seriously hampered humanitarian access in some parts of the country. Various armed forces and groups in the Sudan used children for military purposes and, in Darfur, many girls were victims of ethnically targeted sexual violence. A serious development was the “migration” of recruitment and the use of child soldiers within regions, such as the Mano River and Great Lakes region in Africa.

Numerous speakers agreed with the Secretary-General’s recommendation to expand the Council’s focus and give equal weight to all categories of grave violations beyond the recruitment and use of child soldiers, including the killing and maiming of children, rape and other grave sexual violence, abductions, attacks against schools or hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access for children. Others, however, cautioned against that proposal, saying the original objective – eliminating the recruitment and use of child soldiers — should be closer to achievement before expanding the Council’s focus.

Several other speakers, including the representatives of Sri Lanka, Uganda and Thailand, pointed to inaccuracies in the Secretary-General’s report. Referring to the proposal for a review of the children and armed conflict agenda, Sri Lanka’s representative warned that “megaphone advocacy” would not curb the menace of child recruitment and abuse, and unbridled expansion of the Council’s mandate could dilute attention on the core issue of concern.

Also addressing that issue, the representative of the Russian Federation noted that, as in the past, the multitude of information contained in the Secretary-General’s report was often not verified and had been provided anonymously, raising questions about the report’s reliability and objectivity. A better assessment of events on the ground would raise the confidence of readers not only in terms of the information provided, but also with regard to its recommendations.

Also speaking today were the representatives of France, Greece, China, Japan, Denmark, United States, Qatar, Slovakia, Argentina, Congo, Ghana, United Republic of Tanzania, United Kingdom, Peru, Liechtenstein, Brazil, New Zealand, Colombia, South Africa, Slovenia (on
The meeting began at 10:19 a.m., suspended at 1:04 p.m., resumed at 3:30 p.m. and adjourned at 6 p.m.

The full text of the presidential statement, to be issued as S/PRST/2006/48, reads as follows:

“1. The Security Council takes note with appreciation of the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and the positive developments in the implementation of its resolution 1612 (2005), in particular in the five following areas:

(a) The Security Council takes note with appreciation of the first reports of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and welcomes the increasing awareness by some parties to armed conflicts of its relevant decisions as well as the development by those parties of action plans to end recruitment and use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law.

(b) The Security Council commends the work carried out to that effect by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict (SRSG), Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, including her field activities in the situations of armed conflict.

(c) The Security Council also commends the work carried out by UNICEF and the child protection advisers of peacekeeping operations in cooperation with other relevant United Nations entities.

(d) The Security Council welcomes the cooperation extended to the SRSG, UNICEF and child protection advisers by some parties to armed conflicts in the preparation and implementation of action plans to halt recruitment and use of children in violation of applicable international law.

(e) The Security Council welcomes the sustained activity of its Working Group on children and armed conflict, its recommendations and invites it to continue proposing effective recommendations based on timely, objective, accurate and reliable information for consideration and, where appropriate, implementation by the Council.

“2. The Security Council welcomes the steps taken by national, international and “mixed” criminal courts and tribunals against those who are alleged to have committed grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict in violation of applicable international law.

“3. However, the Security Council strongly condemns the continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of applicable international law, killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence, abductions, denial of humanitarian access to children and attacks against schools and hospitals by parties to armed conflict.

“4. On those bases, the Security Council reiterates its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and, in this connection, its commitment to address the widespread impact of armed conflict on children and its determination to ensure respect for and continued implementation of its resolution 1612 (2005) and all its previous resolutions on children and armed conflict including its intention to act if needed in accordance with paragraph 9 of its resolution 1612 (2005).

“6. The Security Council reiterates its invitation to relevant States affected by armed conflict that are not yet involved in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to join it on a voluntary basis, in cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF.

“7. The Security Council also reiterates its call on relevant parties to armed conflict that have not already done so to prepare and implement, as a matter of priority, concrete time-bound action plans to halt recruitment and use of children in violation of applicable international law, as called for in Security Council resolution 1539 (2005).

“8. Requests the Secretary-General to submit by February 2008 a report on further progress in implementation of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and its previous resolutions on children and armed conflict which would include, inter alia:

i. Information on compliance by parties to armed conflicts in ending the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict in violation of applicable international law and other violations being committed against children affected by armed conflict;

ii. Information on progress made in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism;

iii. Information on progress made in the development and implementation of the action plans referred to in paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005);

iv. Information on mainstreaming of child protection in United Nations peacekeeping operations.”

Background

The Security Council had before it the Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict (document A/61/529-S/2006/826), which provides information on developments from November 2005 to September 2006. The report covers compliance in ending the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and other grave violations, such as the killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence, abductions, denial of humanitarian access to children and attacks against schools and hospitals. It also contains information on progress in the development and implementation of action plans, the assessment of the role and activities of child advisers and the recommendations of an independent review on the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

The report notes that, although progress has been made with respect to the protection of children in a number of situations of armed conflict, new situations have arisen that are of great concern. The recent escalation of violence in the Middle East -- in Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory -- has resulted in thousands of child victims. New evidence suggests that the recruitment and use of child soldiers in conflict, as well as other grave violations, are beginning to “migrate” within regions. The movement of rebel groups across borders to prey upon vulnerable children needs further attention, and monitoring expertise to effectively address the problem needs to be developed. Of particular concern are the Mano
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River and the Great Lakes region of Africa. Another preoccupying phenomenon is the use of children by mercenaries.

Insecurity and a lack of access to affected areas by the United Nations often preclude access to information, especially when non-State actors operate in isolated areas, the report states. Insurgents and rebel groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, operate in a clandestine manner and often in inaccessible areas, posing a challenge in obtaining evidence on recruitment practices and other grave violations against children. In other situations, such as Northern Ireland, there are still concerns about the existence of youth wings of paramilitary organizations. While there has been no specific information on the use of children by illegal armed groups in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation, the United Nations has received information from non-governmental sources that children have been subject to abductions and hostage-taking by illegal armed groups.

The report includes information on compliance and progress in situations on the Council’s agenda, including Afghanistan, Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel, Liberia, Myanmar, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, Somalia and the Sudan. It also describes developments in countries not on the Council’s agenda, including Chad, Colombia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

The Secretary-General recommends that the Council consider expanding its focus and give equal attention to children affected by armed conflict in all situations of concern. He also recommends giving equal weight to all categories of grave violations beyond the recruitment and use of child soldiers, including the killing and maiming of children, rape and other grave sexual violence, abductions, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access for children. He encourages the Council to continue calling upon parties to prepare concrete, time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children in violation of international obligations applicable to them, and to expand the call for action plans to all situations of concern.

The Secretary-General calls upon donors to ensure that adequate resources and funding are available to national Governments, the United Nations and partners for the rehabilitation and reintegration of all children who have been associated with armed forces, and to develop relevant and effective programmatic action that reinforces the rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for children, ensuring long-term sustainability and success of such interventions. He welcomes the Council’s continuing consideration of effective targeted measures against parties to armed conflict who continue to systematically commit grave violations against children in�� arm conflict in defiance of Council resolutions.

The Secretary-General also encourages States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to take measures to support the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in particular by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention and enacting legislation that explicitly prohibits by law the recruitment of children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups, and their direct participation in hostilities.

The Council also had before it three reports by the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in specific countries, namely the Sudan, Côte d’Ivoire and Burundi.

The Secretary-General’s recent report on the children trapped in Sudan’s armed conflict (document S/2006/662) says that, with the humanitarian and security situation there continuing
to deteriorate, all parties should strive to put an end to grave children’s rights violations and grant humanitarian workers unfettered access to children.

In the report, he warns that renewed conflict in Darfur may have drawn attention away from the continuing practice of “ethnically targeted” sexual violence against girls and women. He also details the abuse of children during the armed conflict, which has continued despite the signing of the two peace agreements, and he urges the leaders of the Government of National Unity and the Government of South Sudan to end child recruitment. “The current peace processes in Darfur and southern Sudan offer a real opportunity for the leaders of the Sudan to end the practice of recruitment and use of children once and for all,” he states.

The report specifically focuses on the recruitment, maiming, killing, kidnapping and raping of children by various parties, ranging from the Janjaweed militias and rebel groups in Darfur to Chadian opposition forces and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). While individual commanders of armed groups bear responsibility for grave violations by their forces, Mr. Annan says that the Government of National Unity and the Government of South Sudan are also directly accountable for violations by individuals under their command.

“This responsibility of the Government must be stressed, particularly in the present context of shifting alliances and arrangements in the Sudan,” he says in the report. He adds that he is deeply concerned about the increase in sexual violence against girls and women, particularly in Darfur, as well as reports of the systematic abduction and kidnapping of children there, where girls are often kidnapped for short periods for forced sex. He also expresses his deep concern over the continued lack of access in many areas of the Sudan for child protection activities, particularly in the east.

The Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire (document S/2006/835) covers the period from January 2005 to September 2006.

It highlights, in particular, ongoing conflict among ethnic groups and communities, which is having a severe impact on the lives and well-being of children and preventing the voluntary return of internally displaced persons to their homes. The report also highlights progress made in dialogue with parties to the conflict and outlines the consequent action plans of the Forces Nouvelles and four pro-Government militia groups in western Côte d’Ivoire to end the use of child soldiers and release all children associated with their forces. The report stresses the responsibility of the Government and the Front Populaire Ivoirien to support the United Nations in the identification and establishment of similar dialogue with all other militia groups. It also highlights the follow-up and programmatic response to violations.

The report recommends targeted action and measures against parties and individuals that systematically commit grave violations against children and rigorous and timely investigation and prosecution by relevant authorities of incidents of grave violations against children to address the prevailing culture of impunity. It also calls on the international community and donors to provide timely and adequate assistance for the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for all children associated with fighting forces in the country, to ensure the long-term sustainable success of such efforts.

The report on children and armed conflict in Burundi (document S/2006/851 and Corr.1) describes progress and measures needed towards ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers and other grave violations of children’s rights in the country, covering the period from

Despite the substantial progress achieved in addressing the grave violations of children’s rights detailed in resolution 1612 (2005), the report says violations are still occurring, and the competent authorities have not always conducted criminal investigations, nor punished those responsible.

It says that violations of children’s rights were reported in the provinces where there was armed conflict during the reporting period, committed by the Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu-Forces nationales de liberation (PALIPEHUTU-FNL), the Burundi National Defence Force, the National Intelligence Service and the Burundi National Police.

The Secretary-General calls on all parties to immediately work towards ending these crimes, which include rape and murder, and to prosecute offenders, as Burundi makes a transition from civil war to peace and democracy.

He expresses particular concern at the considerable number of instances of sexual violence against very young girls and stresses the urgency for the Burundian authorities to enact and enforce legislation against sexual violence, carry out thorough investigations and bring the guilty to justice.

He urges the parties to keep children’s rights at the forefront of the peace process, which advanced in September through a comprehensive ceasefire agreement that included PALIPEHUTU-FNL, the final hold-out rebel group. He also urges the Government to ensure that justice mechanisms provide protection to witnesses and victims of human rights violations, especially in the case of children.

The Secretary-General calls on the Burundian Government to grant unfettered access, for child protection purposes, to all military, security and police detention centres and to cooperate with the United Nations country team and child protection partners. Further, he calls on donor countries to make long-term commitments and adopt more systematic approaches to child protection programmes.

Statements

United Nations Secretary-General KOFI ANNAN said the protection of children caught up in armed conflict had been among his main priorities as Secretary-General. During the past 10 years, he had tried to place the issue firmly on the international agenda. Since 1998, when the first Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict had begun his work and the Council had held its first open debate on the subject, the subject had gained greater visibility. The Council’s annual debates had demonstrated that there was a gathering will to act against those who recruited and continued to use child soldiers.

He said the past decade had also seen important gains in the elaboration of international legal standards for the protection of children. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classified recruitment of children into the fighting forces as a war crime and a crime against humanity. The International Labour Organization’s Convention 182 defined child soldiering as one of the worst forms of child labour. The Council had been part of the progress. Its resolutions had highlighted six grave violations, drawn from international humanitarian law, that concerned children affected by armed conflict: killing and maiming; abduction; child soldiers; sexual violence; attacks on schools and hospitals; and denial of humanitarian access.
Today, the international community was shifting its focus from the elaboration of standards to the provision of real protection, he said. In the past year alone, there had been encouraging signals that impunity for crimes against children would no longer be tolerated. The International Criminal Court was prosecuting Thomas Lubanga for conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15 years and using them to participate actively in hostilities. Also, for the first time, a former Head of State, Charles Taylor, was being brought to account for violations committed against children during the conflict in Liberia.

It was necessary to sustain that political and practical momentum, and to keep a close eye on the situations of concern, he continued. To that end, last year, the Council had called for the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism. That mechanism was now at work in seven countries, and was providing timely and reliable information to a task force chaired by his Special Representative. That information had resulted in targeted measures against offending partners, which had led warring parties to agree to concrete action, plans to respect the rights of children. He urged the Council to consider the recommendations of the independent assessment of the reporting and monitoring mechanism to strengthen the monitoring process. The United Nations would continue to do its part in the effort.

Concluding, he noted that, not so long ago, the problem faced by children in situations of armed conflict had in important respects been an invisible issue. Little had been known, and even less had been said. The initiatives he had described represented significant progress. “Yet, we have only begun to scratch the surface,” he said. He hoped the Council would consolidate the gains that had been made and would move forward to cover all situations of concern and all grave violations. “The tangible gains of the past few years show that, when there is political will in the Council, we can make life better for millions of children trapped in situations of armed conflict,” he said.

RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY, Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, presented the Secretary-General’s report, saying that Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) was an important step forward, by enabling the creation of the Council’s working group on children and armed conflict, which met every two months. Reports by United Nations country teams in Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Sudan, Sri Lanka and Nepal had been taken as a starting point for the working group’s activities, under the chairmanship of the Permanent Representative of France. The working group had succeeded in defining a “toolkit” of possible actions for the Council, and had also undertaken a series of useful recommendations on country situation reports on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan.

She said peace agreements signed over the last few years, including in Côte d’Ivoire, Burundi and the Sudan, had included child protection provisions and a framework for child demobilization. She hoped peace talks in Nepal would also focus on obtaining the release of children associated with fighting forces there. As for the demobilization of child soldiers, commitments by Côte d’Ivoire, Burundi, Myanmar and Uganda would result in concrete action. The Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory had extended an invitation to the Under-Secretary-General to visit their countries, in order to enter into constructive dialogue regarding children and armed conflict, and those visits would hopefully be concluded in the first half of 2007.

She went on to say, though a great deal had been done in formulating standards and
receiving commitments, actual implementation was far from satisfactory. The issue needed to be properly mainstreamed within the United Nations, and the parties involved should be made aware of the consequences if they did not live up to their commitments. Recommendations of the Security Council working group on the need to monitor the situation more closely were noted with appreciation. So far, the monitoring process had focused on only a few countries, and the working group was encouraged to move forward with consultations among a wider array of countries, so that there was equal treatment of children no matter where they lived.

Turning to child soldiers, she said several grave violations deserved particular attention, one of which was the increasing number of reports of sexual violence as an instrument of war. That type of violence should be reflected more fully in the annexed lists of the annual Secretary-General’s report. Focus should also be given to emerging issues that had grave implications for the protection of children, for example a diminished distinction between civilians and combatants during warfare. It was important that the Security Council and Member States reiterate their commitment to actively uphold international law. Those laws and standards were marked by respect for the protection of civilians; proportionality; keeping military assets away from civilian centres; and respect for safe zones, such as schools and hospitals. Deviations from those principles should be condemned.

She added that the “recycling” of child soldiers within conflict zones was also of concern. Children demobilized in Sierra Leone, for instance, had resurfaced in Côte d’Ivoire, and there were similar movements in the African Great Lakes region. Demobilization and reintegration programmes run by national Governments, United Nations agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations should be made more effective. A lunch-time event, hosted by the Office of the Special Representative would bring together “children of war”, who were expected to speak to the United Nations community of their experiences.

ANN M. VENEMAN, Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), noted that, today, hundreds of thousands of children were beginning their day as child soldiers fighting adult wars. The reasons for the conflicts were complex, but the result was simple: children bore the brunt of those conflicts. Some 43 million children were out of school and about 80 per cent of refugees fleeing war were women and children.

She added that the Secretary-General’s report indicated that children were deliberately targeted during times of violence. It also detailed information on six grave violations of children’s rights perpetrated by over 40 parties in more than 20 conflict-affected areas. Violations against children continued to be committed in defiance of agreed international law. By naming the parties, however, the Council had demonstrated its determination to match words with deeds. Those who violated international standards to protect children could no longer do so with impunity. The list annexed to the report represented an important step forward in compliance with international child protection standards.

Despite progress made, new areas of concern required attention, she said. She remained deeply concerned by ongoing conflicts in several countries. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, some 119 Palestinian children had been killed this year, more than twice the number of deaths registered in 2005. It was time to scale-up protection and support to children in that fractured region. In Chad, the ongoing fighting between Government forces and the armed opposition, and the presence of Sudanese rebels — from the Sudanese Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement — had led to tremendous insecurity in the refugee camps and continuous attacks on surrounding villages. Children were at particular risk and the
Government must ensure the safety of refugees and local populations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she had listened to first-hand accounts of routine rape used as a weapon against young girls.

She noted that the Secretary-General’s report provided information on two specific areas critical to enhanced protection of children from conflict, namely the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the implementation of action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. In the past year, the Council and its working group on children and armed conflict had given concerted attention to the concerns of children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF would continue to support the further strengthening of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms, as called for in Council resolution 1612 (2005). Working closely with many partners, UNICEF continued to negotiate for humanitarian access and dialogue with parties to end the recruitment and use of children associated with fighting forces.

When children were uprooted and traumatized by armed conflict, education could play a key role in bringing stability and security back into their lives, she said. Education also contributed to building an environment supportive of future peacebuilding efforts. The pursuit of peace was integral to the fulfilment of children’s rights, including their rights to physical safety, health and well-being. Children, young people and women must be part of the solution. “We have made significant progress over the past year,” she said. “Today, we must renew our commitment to the children who are impacted by this unacceptable practice.”

GABRIEL OLING OLANG, representative of Save the Children, said he had come to share his experiences as the District Manager for Save the Children in the war-ravaged area of northern Uganda -- who lived in situations similar to their counterparts in other conflict-ridden places like Afghanistan, Colombia, Nepal, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Sudan, to name a few. There were three themes that were neglected in the international comments and response: stronger pressure for humanitarian access; special attention to girls associated with armed forces; and better response to reports of violations against children.

Indeed, he said, the Secretary-General had reported in 2004 that 10 million people were denied access to humanitarian relief; since more than half of the vulnerable population was under the age of 18, that meant millions of children were stranded without access to vital assistance and protection. Also, the international community needed to open its eyes to the special needs of girls, and increase funding from donors to create disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes that were better suited to them.

The Council must come up with stronger ways of protecting children on the ground, he said. The increased number of United Nations child protection advisers deployed into crisis areas had been a good start. But, if mainstreaming child protection was to become a reality, the child protection system must be extended and better supported. Save the Children wholeheartedly endorsed the Secretary-General’s recommendations that the Security Council consider strengthening the monitoring and reporting mechanism. The Council should also give equal attention to children affected by armed conflict in all situations of concern, and give equal weight to all categories of grave violations.

What could be done for those children? he asked. He said that, in Uganda, education and catering to protection needs in every humanitarian response had been the key to successful interventions. As a result, Save the Children had engaged in a worldwide challenge called “Rewrite the Future”, calling for education for all children affected by armed conflict. Education
should be funded and programmed as part of every humanitarian response, as it had been proven to lower infant mortality rates and increase children’s resistance to forced recruitment and exploitation, such as forced prostitution. It was also a crucial part of a child’s survival strategy and taught life skills, such as landmine awareness, protection from HIV/AIDS, and hygiene and disease prevention.

Finally, he said dealing with the problem of children who were missing and unaccounted for required creative strategies. The Council was encouraged to continue its ground-breaking path to correct the wrongs against children affected by armed conflict.

JEAN-PIERRE LACROIX (France) said that, since the issue had first appeared on the international agenda 10 years ago, child soldiers continued to be recruited by militia groups, young girls continued to be victims of systematic sexual violence and children continued to “disappear” during periods of ethnic cleansing or were kidnapped for ransom. Furthermore, children were themselves killed or wounded during periods of fighting through direct attacks on schools, or were denied access to care by belligerents. It was against such a backdrop that the Council had assumed its responsibilities and, indeed, two of its resolutions -- 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005) -- had given the body the tools it needed to deal with the scourge.

He said that international standards had also been created to further strengthen the protection of children. Those included, for example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Second Optional Protocol; the Rome Statute; and best practices on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers, through principles that were to be fleshed out at a UNICEF conference in February 2007. Both the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict and UNICEF should be commended for their work to fight the abuse of children and for encouraging other United Nations entities to carry out the fight within their respective mandates. Those parties were also commended for going on the ground, in conjunction with non-governmental organizations, to collect data on the subject as stipulated in resolution 1612, sometimes at the risk of losing their own lives. As for the working group, which France chaired, it would soon consider the situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Sudan, and was preparing to adopt decisions on Burundi and Côte d’Ivoire. The working group would soon receive reports on Sri Lanka, Somalia and Nepal.

He said that inspiration should be taken from the successful release of child soldiers in Côte d’Ivoire, working within a framework created upon the adoption of resolution 1612. States affected by the problem of child soldiers were encouraged to support Under-Secretary-General Coomaraswamy, who was due to visit their countries. Also, those who continued to defy the Council’s authority should be prosecuted. The Peacebuilding Commission should be considered as a possible avenue for action. The Commission, for instance, could be called upon to help reintegrate child soldiers into the community and to prevent their migration to neighbouring countries as fighters.

ADAMANTIOS VASSILAKIS (Greece) said the Secretary-General’s report fully addressed the main issues underlined in resolution 1612 (2005) and submitted specific and well-focused recommendations. The fact that the report identified some 40 armed groups in 12 conflict zones as being involved in the recruitment, killing, maiming, abduction, rape and sexual abuse and exploitation of children raised the greatest concerns. The fact that those crimes were committed against the most vulnerable groups made the situation, by all accounts, intolerable. It was encouraging, however, that the issue remained high on the Council’s agenda. By adopting six resolutions since 1999, the Council had contributed to the international recognition
of the responsibility to protect children’s human rights in armed conflict.

He said he appreciated, in particular, the important developments in connection with the implementation of resolution 1612, which had enabled the Council to take a more pragmatic approach to further promoting all related issues at hand. The first major step, in that context, had been the gradual setting-up of a monitoring and reporting mechanism, starting from situations on the Council’s agenda. During the initial phase, the mechanism had produced country-specific reports with well-documented and reliable information. While its full implementation was a complex issue, he believed that it would eventually serve the purpose of its establishment. The report of the independent review of the mechanism clearly pointed in that direction.

The second important development, he continued, had been the establishment in November 2005 of the Council’s working group on children and armed conflict, chaired by France. The working group could assist the Council in better evaluating the reports of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and in formulating appropriate actions to protect children affected by armed conflict. Underlining the importance of fighting impunity by bringing the perpetrators to justice, he said it was the primary responsible of States to take all necessary relevant measures. Protecting children in armed conflict required hard work and a variety of measures, which presupposed the will and active involvement of national Governments, armed groups and the international community. The underpinning for such efforts was the ability to conduct a continuous dialogue with all parties to an armed conflict.

LIU ZHENMIN (China) expressed hope that the Council would play a unique role in its consideration of the issue. First, the Council needed to continue to carry out its primary responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security. If it could prevent, reduce and resolve conflict situations by tackling their root causes, it would be providing the best protection for children. Such an approach was far more meaningful and effective than any attempt to remedy the situation after a conflict had already broken out. Events of the past year bore that out: a recent escalation of tension in part of the Middle East had once again taken a heavy toll on the lives of many children, whereas positive developments in other regions had brought hope to children.

In considering the issue of children and armed conflict, the Council needed to draw a distinction between situations on its agenda and those that were not, he continued. While concerned about the protection of children in both types of situations, the Council should, nonetheless, follow different approaches in dealing with them. Relevant resolutions of the Security Council had specific provisions to that effect. Furthermore, many countries not on the Council’s agenda had misgivings about the motive and implications of the Council’s consideration of the situation in their countries. The Council should, therefore, try to allay their concern through dialogue and cooperation, to convince them that the purpose of its work was the protection of children.

It was also necessary to continue to improve the monitoring and reporting mechanism for children and armed conflict, as well as the work of the working group, he said. Although progress had been made, the mechanism was still at an early stage of application. With the independent review of the mechanism only recently completed, it needed improvements through further practice and should not move too fast or act too hastily. The working group had deliberated on situations of children in many countries. China hoped that it would continue to demonstrate its professionalism and, through cooperation and constructive discussions with the Governments concerned, submit effective recommendations to the Council.
He added that China had always advised against frequent resort to sanctions or threats of sanctions by the Council, and considered caution especially necessary on the question of children and armed conflict. Every conflict was different, and there could be no generalizations or a one-size-fits-all approach. It was necessary to work with the countries concerned and encourage and support their efforts to protect children.

KENZO OSHIMA (Japan) noted that, although progress had been made with respect to the protection of children, the situation of children affected by armed conflict continued to be grave and alarming. The recent conflict in the Middle East region, for example, once again showed that children bore the brunt of conflicts. Sadly, in many parts of the world, cases of recruitment and abusive use of children and other grave violations against children in armed conflict persisted. Japan supported the call for the parties to conflicts to prepare time-bound action plans to halt recruitment and use of children in violation of applicable international obligations. He also welcomed the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms in several countries, including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia, the Sudan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, as encouraging progress.

The recent independent review of the monitoring and reporting mechanism by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) pursuant to resolution 1612 had provided useful inputs, he said. He appreciated the working group's contributions, especially its recommendations on the reports on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. Japan advocated the concept of "human security" to enhance protection and empower people at the community and individual levels. One important aspect of Japan's assistance effort was in the process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. Much more needed to be done in that and other areas, however, as such assistance constituted a key element in the protection of children in armed conflict. The issue should be a priority for the international community, and it was especially important to mainstream the issue into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system.

ELLEN MARGRETHE LØJ (Denmark) said she fully supported the Secretary-General's recommendations regarding the status of children in armed conflicts. The report at hand clearly demonstrated why the subject was before the Council. The fundamental question was whether or not the international community acknowledged its responsibility to protect children. A comprehensive approach that included legal, political, and socio-economic measures was needed to improve the situation of children in armed conflict, with mindfulness to the interlinkage between security and development. Also, action needed to be taken against Governments and other parties that recruited or forced children to become armed combatants. She called for all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes to address the special needs of child soldiers, including the particular needs of girls, with incentives given to provide children with real alternatives to war.

She fully supported a number of the steps taken by United Nations entities, Governments and civil society, which were indispensable stepping stones in the process to enable the Council to address the issue in a comprehensive and robust manner. But, further steps were needed to complete the established framework for child protection, such as making the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the working group truly thematic and to cover all situations of concern, in particular those identified in the two annexes of the annual report from the Secretary-General. In addition, Security Council efforts to engage in dialogue with all parties in armed conflicts that violated the rights of children must be reinforced, to ensure an end to those
practices, with a particular focus on the development of concrete and time-bound action plans to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Finally, she said the Council must not shy away from sanctions, referral of violators to international courts or stronger enforcement of peacekeeping mandates to protect children, with special attention paid to the 16 “persistent violators”.

She concluded by saying she was encouraged by the decision of the Council to confront those who prey on children and deny their full potential as human beings. She sensed a genuine will to mitigate the widespread impact of armed conflict on children. She said the criticism that the issue should not come before the Council missed the point, as continued recruitment of soldiers and the abuse that parties to armed conflict perpetrated against children were at the heart of efforts to maintain international peace and security, and needed to be addressed in all relevant situations where those acts were committed.

JACKIE WOLCOTT SANDERS (United States) said it was important that the United Nations, the Security Council and individual Governments kept their eyes trained on the issue of children and armed conflict, especially in light of the alarming number of victims worldwide. Indeed, the recruitment of child soldiers continued, especially in the Middle East and Africa’s Great Lakes region. Annex countries listed in the Secretary-General’s report were called on to halt the recruitment and use of child soldiers, in particular the Sudan, Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

She said Burma was thought to have largest number of child soldiers. The military regime there had acknowledged the presence of child soldiers in its armies and had claimed to have taken action against five of the officials involved. In addition, it had claimed to have set up a committee to prevent the problem. But, according to a Thai-based non-governmental organization devoted to the issue, the regime had actually done little to prevent children from being recruited into the military. In fact, 20 per cent of the army, or 90,000 people, were under the age of 18. International organizations and relevant United Nations agencies should be allowed to enter the country to help reintegrate child soldiers into society. Another notable problem was the systematic rape of women and girls belonging to ethnic minorities as an instrument of armed conflict. Member States were encouraged to provide assistance to combat such violations.

Turning to the Sudan and Chad, she said that militia groups continued to recruit child soldiers and, in Darfur, rape was being used as a weapon of war. The Government of the Sudan, which was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its related Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, should take immediate steps to halt those practices. In Uganda, the Lord’s Resistance Army had abducted a large number of children and then used those children to hack fellow children to death to prevent their escape, and girls were customarily given to high-ranking officials as so-called wives. Meanwhile, international and non-governmental organizations were also urged to adhere to a common code of conduct to prevent the abuse of children by peacekeeping personnel, and to punish the perpetrators. For its part, the United States had allocated $34 million to prevent the recruitment of children in armed conflict and to support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts. The Secretary-General’s report was welcomed, and the United States was presently reviewing its recommendations.

NASSIR ABDUL AZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar) said current global concentration on the issue was heartening, as it had shone a light on perpetrators and led to concrete and time-bound action
plans to end the recruitment of child soldiers, as well as to the development of national laws to criminalize such actions. Initiatives directed against the detention and trafficking of children and the rape of girls had also been given more focus. He commended UNICEF and the Special Representative for their aggressive implementation of Council resolution 1612 (2005).

However, even with all that progress, Qatar was not wholly satisfied, he said. More needed to be done to protect the thousands of children in numerous countries that remained victims to abhorrent violations. In that connection, the plight of children in the Middle East, especially in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon, came to mind. The various monitoring, reporting and compliance actions of concerned partners were commended, but there needed to be a more collaborative relationship with the Peacebuilding Commission, particularly in addressing children’s protection, demobilization and reintegration needs.

DUŠAN MATULAY (Slovakia) fully supported implementation of Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, particularly resolution 1612. He said that the previous day’s Arria formula meeting with representatives of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Children Soldiers, the Save the Children Alliance and the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, had provided an excellent opportunity to hear the valuable recommendations of non-governmental organizations active on the front lines. He welcomed progress in implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the development and realization of action plans, as well as the information on the activities of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions. He added that thousands of children associated with armed groups and affected by armed conflict had benefited from the work of various United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations and other important actors on the ground.

Unfortunately, he said, the problems persisted in many of the situations reported in the Secretary-General’s 2005 report, and new conflict situations had arisen, where a great deal of effort was needed to prevent the victimization of children. He warned that safe and unhindered access was not available to the United Nations and other humanitarian personnel in many countries in conflict situations, and the Governments of those countries must cooperate with United Nations bodies. Particular attention needed to be paid to the issue of girl combatants and girls associated with armed groups. Further, impunity for crimes against children was unacceptable, and national judicial authorities had the primary responsibility for bringing perpetrators to justice, or else the active engagement of the International Criminal Court needed to be considered. Many parties to conflicts had disregarded the international community and continued to recruit child soldiers. Effective, targeted measures against those parties by the international community could lead to changes of behaviour.

He concluded by expressing strong concern about the involvement of United Nations peacekeeping personnel in sexual exploitation of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and fully supported the zero-tolerance policy in respect of crimes committed by United Nations personnel. He hoped the investigation of the allegations would be duly conducted and the offenders would not remain unpunished. He also believed that appropriate training, including gender training, of peacekeepers had a positive effect on the behaviour and conduct of troops, and that the issue should be properly addressed while carrying out security sector reform plans.

CESAR MAYORAL (Argentina) said that, while resolution 1612 had provided the Council with a set of useful tools, the situation presented in the Secretary-General’s report showed the insufficiency of the steps that had been taken so far. It was necessary to reinforce the current
system by providing it with adequate means and to redouble the political commitment to find remedies for the victims and to end the impunity of the perpetrators.

Highlighting the elements that required more focused attention, he said that the monitoring and reporting mechanism left room for improvement. The working group should thoroughly study the recommendations of OIOS, which had carried out an independent review of such a mechanism, as requested by resolution 1612. The Council should also consider the possibility of expanding the scope of the mechanism to ensure equal treatment to all conflict situations where children were victims. All violations had the same gravity, and the mechanism should attach the same priority to all of them. Concerned States and parties to conflict should be even more involved in dialogue with United Nations entities to elaborate national action plans, as requested by resolution 1539(2004).

He also emphasized the importance of ensuring constant and predictable resources for monitoring and reporting, as well as for the implementation of the national plans. Political will must be translated into major resources to increase accountability. That issue was closely linked to the training of staff in charge of the mechanism’s application. At the same time, adequate resources would allow current demobilization and reintegration programmes to continue and new programmes to be implemented, with particular emphasis on the phase of rehabilitation and reintegration of children into their families and communities. Interaction with civil society was fundamental at all levels.

He also stressed the importance of identifying those who were responsible for violations, thus putting a final end to the climate of impunity. The issue of children and armed conflict was also linked to such subjects as gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, protection of civilians in conflict and economic development of societies affected by conflict. In accordance with resolution 1612, information collected through the monitoring and reporting mechanism could be transmitted not only to the Council, but also to the General Assembly and other competent bodies, such as the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the sanctions committees.

“We do not favour a policy of naming and shaming, but we believe that the gravity of the situation merits concrete steps to stop the misconduct of some parties who continue to commit grave abuses against children,” he said. From that point of view, Argentina believed that it was effective to list the responsible parties in the report of the Secretary-General. He would like the working group to advance in the consideration of recommending targeted and gradual measures against those parties where there was certain evidence that violations had been committed against children in conflict. Also a source of concern was the denial of humanitarian help to children, and he called on all parties in conflict to allow secure access for the personnel in charge of humanitarian assistance and protection of children. Finally, he said that a subject of this magnitude should not be confined to the action of the Council, but should take a broader dimension through a growing involvement of the General Assembly.

PASCAL GAYAMA (Congo) noted that, in the short span of three months, the Council was holding its second debate on children and armed conflict, reflecting its interest in the issue. His country had suffered from recurring civil wars and understood the broad consequences of armed conflict on children. In implementing resolution 1612, monitoring and reporting mechanisms were being created in a growing number of countries. The progress achieved in the first phase was encouraging. Since 1990, the African region had adopted a Charter on the rights and well-being of children as a common position on the protection of children in situations
of armed conflict. The periodic assessment of developments was necessary. Difficulties -- such as the obstacles to access by United Nations personnel and the need for a clear distribution of tasks and adequate financial resources -- must be overcome. The reporting and monitoring mechanisms were the first link in a chain and the starting point of a process, the purpose of which should be the crafting of time-bound action plans.

Despite progress by certain States, there was a great deal to be done, he said. He commended the efforts by Côte d’Ivoire, including its handing over of children to UNICEF and prohibition of child recruitment. He encouraged other States not to remain at the level of mere commitment, but to ensure that concrete measures were taken to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers. The same could be said for the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by United Nations peacekeepers. He also took note of the importance of the role of child protection specialists in the collection of data and reporting of information. His delegation supported the Secretary-General’s recommendations, including his call for the Council to give equal care to children affected by armed conflict in all situations of concern.

He added that particular attention should be focused on Darfur, to ensure that the parties understood the obligation to spare children and undertake concrete commitments to that end. He also expected that from the Lord’s Resistance Army, as a logical consequence of a crisis in which children had paid a price they were never meant to have paid. Turning to the international community, he said it was important to ensure that the necessary financing was available to ensure the successful reintegration and rehabilitation of children associated with conflict. The United Nations should also reiterate the need to create a more secure and peaceful world that would not allow children to be affected by morally reprehensible acts. After all, children could only replicate what they learned from adults.

ALBERT YANKEY (Ghana) noted that, as a signatory to the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Ghana was keenly aware of the enormous challenges faced by African countries to end all violations of the rights and dignity of children. In that regard, cooperation could be enhanced between the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the United Nations, as well as relevant non-governmental organizations. Ghana attached great importance to the findings and recommendations in the Secretary-General’s report, as well as that of the independent review. States parties must muster the political will and commitment to strengthen measures to prevent the recruitment of children to armed forces or armed groups, particularly by signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. More important, it was necessary for all concerned to enact legislation clearly forbidding the recruitment of underage children into armed forces or groups and their direct participation in hostilities.

He said action plans could only be meaningful when they were rooted in realism, both in terms of the required resources and a genuine commitment to the underlying objectives. Information constituted the greatest weapon in redressing the negative impact of armed conflict on children. The role of the monitoring and reporting mechanism could not be overstated. Action was required both at the national and international level to mobilize the necessary resources and enhance the capacity to gather first-hand information in the field for use by the appropriate law enforcement authorities. For its part, the Council, through its working group, must continue to pay close attention to the monitoring and reporting mechanism and extend to it every support in meeting the challenges ahead, not least the elimination of the conditions in which the abuse of children flourished.
ILYA ROGACHEV (Russian Federation) noted the progress made in the area of children and armed conflict, but said there was ample room for enhancing the effectiveness of the bodies and structures involved. Indeed, the issue of the rights of children in conflict and post-conflict situations were on the agenda of not only the Security Council, but also of the General Assembly’s Third Committee, the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. The adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) had also brought new impetus to the area, and the pressing task now facing the United Nations was to encourage a system-wide efforts, provided that the different entities acted within their mandates.

He went on to commend the Secretary-General’s report for focusing on practical aspects of the issue. However, as in the past, the multitude of information contained in it was often not verified and had been provided anonymously, raising questions about the report’s reliability and objectivity. A better assessment of events on the ground would raise the confidence of readers, not only in terms of the information provided, but also with regard to its recommendations. He supported the recommendations that the Security Council pay attention to all conflict situations and to the six violations of children’s rights, as well as to the list of violating parties.

However, he said it was necessary to make clear whether the report’s recommendations applied to its own annexed list only, or to lists derived from all the world’s conflicts, as displayed in other reports. The Russian Federation believed that focus should be given to the most acute and large-scale armed conflicts on the Council’s agenda, and not just those taking place in Africa. Numerous other bodies were authorized to protect children and to fight impunity, and they could very well deal with the remaining cases. The working group and its monitoring and reporting mechanism must be applied with strict compliance to resolution 1612 (2005). It was also important that information provided by the mechanism be objective, up to date and reliable, and it must function with the involvement of national Governments. It was hoped that the working group would prepare balanced recommendations regarding countries already before the Council, and that system-wide efforts would be launched to remedy the dire situation of children in armed conflict.

AUGUSTINE P. MAHIGA (United Republic of Tanzania), reiterating his country’s grave concern at continued violations of children’s rights by both State and non-State actors, said that, in the Great Lakes region, the problem of recruiting and using child soldiers had persisted for a long time, but had subsided with the signing and implementation of peace agreements. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers were major challenges that required a comprehensive strategy, as well as resources and political commitment. Those issues would be addressed during next month’s summit of the Great Lakes countries, to be held in Nairobi.

While fully supporting the recommendations contained in the reports, he emphasized that the Council should expand its focus and allow for equal attention to both situations of armed conflict and those of concern, so that a monitoring and reporting mechanism could apply to all situations, regardless of whether they fell annex I or II of resolution 1612. Also, although there were difficulties in the monitoring and reporting mechanism due to terrain, security and resources, action must be taken against individuals who had been identified as perpetrators. In addition to “naming and shaming”, threats of sanctions would definitely have a deterrent effect. He also urged more resources to ensure the success of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.

EMYR JONES PARRY (United Kingdom) said the report was a sobering read and clearly
demonstrated that there were significant challenges, if the international community was to turn existing momentum into widespread progress on the ground where it mattered. In particular, there was a need to look for ways to refine existing strategies and reintegrate children that were associated with armed groups. The OIOS report on the monitoring and reporting mechanism had made some important recommendations, which the working group must take forward. In the last decade, the international community had played a crucial role in defining a framework in which to address issues associated with children and armed conflict. The Council should build on that process. In that regard, he supported the proposal to undertake a strategic review of the children and armed conflict agenda.

He agreed that much more needed to be done to address the situation of children and armed conflict. The parties involved must develop and implement action plans to halt the recruitment and use of child soldiers. They should also make every effort to assist in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. The international community must stand ready to help them in that regard. A systematic approach, coordinated among the United Nations family, was needed to implement action in individual theatres. Where progress was found to be inadequate, the international community must consider taking action against the parties involved and those individuals responsible for egregious violations must be held to account. The Council had an important role to play in that connection. One specific case required urgent attention, namely that of Sri Lanka. The United Kingdom remained committed to playing a full and active role in the Council and its working group. All States had an obligation to end the suffering that children in armed conflict faced throughout the world today.

Council President JOSÉ ANTONIO GARCIA BELAUNDE, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru, speaking in his national capacity, said that the world faced numerous challenges caused by unfinished processes of nation-building, terrorism, the threat of nuclear proliferation and some “contradictory tendencies” of today’s international system. Paradoxically, as the world became more integrated, it was the number of domestic conflicts that had substantially increased on the Council’s agenda. To deal with such conflicts, it was necessary to examine their root causes, which often lay with exclusion, instability and the vulnerability of peoples. As such, structural factors that created exclusion, such as poverty, environmental degradation and deterioration of social values, must be taken into account.

As for Peru, he said his country had been implementing policies aimed at eliminating social exclusion, convinced that the only path to preserve peace and buttress democracy was through the reduction of social disparities and poverty. That also included strengthening the “culture of duty” among its people based on the rule of law. He welcomed the fact that the Council, apart from its usual work related to conflicts under its consideration, dealt in a comprehensive way with some features common to all. The impact of armed conflict on children was a remarkable example of such an approach. He commended the Secretary-General’s report and welcomed the progress achieved in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. More needed to be done, and the Council’s working group was a step in the right direction. All parties involved in armed conflict were called upon to cooperate with the working group, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on the issue, as well as UNICEF. He urged the donor community to support the efforts to reintegrate and demobilize child soldiers. “The task that lies ahead is of an extraordinary magnitude,” he said. There was no better way of preventing future conflicts than by providing today’s children with proper living conditions, so they could become future men and women of peace.

PATRICK RITTER (Liechtenstein) said that full implementation of resolution 1612 (2005)
depended on political will, and Council members -- especially permanent members -- were encouraged to demonstrate their leadership. Targeted Security Council sanctions must be complemented by the work of the International Criminal Court and by national courts, so as to bring the perpetrators of such violations to justice. The resolution had also established the monitoring and reporting mechanism, on which the Council’s working group had based its activities. An independent review by OIOS had acknowledged the important function of that mechanism in raising awareness of the issue at local, national and international levels. But, Liechtenstein concurred with the assessment that clarification was needed on the intended use of the information it gathered. Indeed, implementation difficulties might be encountered in certain places of the world.

He said that enhancing the mechanism’s potential entailed the extension of its scope to six categories of grave violations of children’s rights, and to include all relevant conflict situations on equal terms. Political considerations must not override the fundamental rules of the protection of children. For its part, Liechtenstein had addressed the plight of children affected by armed conflict since the creation of various related United Nations mechanisms, and would continue to do so as a member of the Group of Friends of Children Affected by Armed Conflict.

KIRSTI LINTONEN (Finland) on behalf of the European Union, noted that, despite the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, millions of children continued to have their human rights violated and continued to suffer in situations of armed conflict. Every day, children were killed, maimed, abducted or recruited as child soldiers. They also fell victims to rape or other grave sexual violence and suffered when schools and hospitals were attacked. Children in armed conflict suffered from physical, emotional and social problems. No society could afford to put their children at risk, as the development of entire societies suffered when its children were denied a safe childhood.

Ten years ago, the Graca Machel report had laid the foundation for putting children and armed conflict on the international agenda, she said. Security Council resolution 1612 had come five years after the Council’s adoption of its first resolution on children and armed conflict. While important steps had been taken to improve the situation, further efforts and better coordinated actions were needed. She welcomed, therefore, the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the setting up of the working group.

There had been both negative and positive developments in the past year, she said. The escalation of violence in the Middle East had cost several hundred children their lives and thousands more had suffered other serious problems. The conflict in Sri Lanka had escalated, and children had been recruited by both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the so-called Karuna fraction. In Somalia, a long period without a central Government had left the majority of children without the opportunity for even basic education. It had also seriously hampered humanitarian access in some parts of the country. Various armed forces and groups in the Sudan used children for military purposes and, in Darfur, many girls were victims of ethnically targeted sexual violence. A serious development was the “migration” of recruitment and the use of child soldiers within regions, such as the Mano River and Great Lakes region in Africa. The International Criminal Court must find a way to stop rebel groups from preying upon children for recruitment.

The Secretary-General’s report, she continued, provided important recommendations. All grave violations of human rights and international law suffered by children in all conflicts should receive equal attention. It was necessary for the reporting mechanisms to address all relevant
situations in equal terms. She also stressed the need to recognize gender-based issues in the drawing up of peace agreements, the assignment of peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions and in the planning of demobilization and reintegration programmes. Rape and grave sexual violence against children was a particularly severe violation of their rights and could constitute a war crime, genocide or a crime against humanity. The sustainability of demobilization and reintegration programmes could be enhanced by supporting national initiatives and by encouraging national ownership of the programmes. Adequate international funding must be ensured for the rehabilitation and reintegration of all children that had been associated with armed forces.

Welcoming a 10-year review of the Graca Machel report, she said such a review would provide an opportunity to assess the situation of children in armed conflict and highlight the challenges ahead. In-depth and more systematic research relating to different issues of children and armed conflict was needed. Since that report, much progress had been achieved. Monitoring and reporting had improved. While some parties were making true progress in protecting children from grave violations in armed conflicts, others continued to violate the rights of the most vulnerable. The international community must, therefore, proceed from monitoring and reporting to response. The Council should call on parties to follow up on its call for preparation of concrete, time-bound action plans. It should also consider measures against parties that systematically committed grave violations of children’s rights. The most important protective factor for children was, however, peace and non-violent solutions to conflict.

RONALDO MOTA SARDENBERG (Brazil) said he was pleased to see progress in implementing resolution 1612, particularly in establishing the monitoring and reporting mechanism. While understanding the challenges inherent in a complex initiative, he remained convinced that efforts not be spared in achieving coordination among all relevant United Nations entities, as that would enable the provision of accurate monitoring reports, which, in turn, would help to create child protection measures.

The Security Council should closely coordinate its work with the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, he said. Brazil had noted progress in the recent implementation of time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children by those involved in armed conflict, and encouraged further development of that strategy. Further, he looked forward to examining the results of the study on the role of child protection advisers in gathering information for reporting purposes, and mainstreaming child protection within missions. Brazil was fully committed to protecting the rights of children and was determined to maximize the United Nations’ work in that area, as it was essential to preventing child victimization.

KRISTY GRAHAM (New Zealand), while stressing that children continued to be disproportionately killed in conflict situations and recruited as soldiers, said the Secretary-General’s report demonstrated some progress. She welcomed steps taken to deploy the monitoring mechanism across the situations designated as priorities, and initial work on developing and implementing action plans. Further, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations’ deployment of child protection advisers into peacekeeping operations was important in raising awareness among United Nations police and military observers. Rehabilitation and reintegration work had also progressed, with tens of thousands of former child soldiers benefiting from such programmes as the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme, among others.

However, further measures were needed, she said. New Zealand supported the Secretary-
General’s recommendation that attention focus on the wide impact of armed conflict on children, including the killing of children, rape, abductions and denial of humanitarian access. Moreover, equal attention should be given to children in all armed conflicts, rather than select situations. She strongly supported the work of the International Criminal Court, and called on members to show real commitment by signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CLAUDIA BLUM (Colombia) said that her Government continued to make progress in constructing peace, while strengthening security and the rule of law in the process. There was also greater respect for human rights and greater vigour in implementing social programmes aimed at the vulnerable populations. Nearly 43,000 members of illegal armed groups had been demobilized and the number of children recruited into armed conflict had been reduced substantially as a result of laws prohibiting the recruitment of people below 18 years of age. As the Secretary-General’s report indicated, violent groups outside the law were the only parties that recruited children in Colombia. The number of kidnappings had also been reduced, and internal displacement had slowed.

She said more than 3,000 children had entered into the special attention programmes established by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, where assistance was provided to reintegrate them with their families and social environments. Children also suffered because of the drug trade. Although Colombia joined other countries in rejecting the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, it believed that it was not appropriate to give equal attention to children affected by conflict in all situations of concern. Doing so might diminish the difference between annex I and II in the report, when, in fact, particular conditions had led the Council to clearly differentiate between the two. Also, there must be ample discussion of results from the independent review before changes to established approaches and procedures were made.

She added that it was not appropriate to give other violations affecting children the same weight as that of recruitment and use. The additional grave violations were all condemnable, but they did not correspond to the reason the issue had been brought to the Council. A change in approach would weaken the objective, which was to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Further, she believed action plans should continue to be prepared only in those situations on the Council’s agenda in accordance with what was established in resolution 1539 (2004).

FRANCIS K. BUTAGIRA (Uganda), confining his remarks to paragraphs in the report concerning his country, said Uganda had agreed with the Special Representative on four principles: its Government would agree on an action plan to sensitize stakeholders, monitor implementation of various laws and remove children if and when found in the armed forces; it would reiterate its commitment to discipline those military officers and officials who knowingly recruited and used children; it would strengthen existing procedures for access to military institutions by designated bodies; and it would review existing laws on aiding and abetting the recruitment of children in the armed forces by civilian officials.

He said it was not true that children were present among the local defence units and the Uganda People’s Defence Force, as the report suggested. The existing legal framework and policy did not allow the recruitment of persons below the age of 18. Furthermore, there had been no recruitment into the Defence Force since the Special Representative’s visit, which meant that no children could have been recruited in the first place. Indeed, forces were being demobilized in areas of Uganda where peace had returned, and whenever abducted children
were rescued from the Lord’s Resistance Army, they were rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. Also, it was incorrect to say that there were many reported cases of sexual exploitation -- one quoted example could not justify such a sweeping statement. The Defence Force was highly disciplined, and severe punishment was meted in the case of misbehaviour.

He commended the Special Representative for her cooperation with the Ugandan Government, in a marked departure from that of her predecessor, who had seized every opportunity to demonize the Government for his own hidden political agenda. He had falsely listed the Uganda People’s Defence Force and the Local Defence Forces in annex II to the Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict as organizations that recruited children into armed forces. He hoped that, under Ms. Coomaraswamy, those organizations would be removed from annex II, not as a favour, but as a correction of a wrong. The Council’s presidential statement calling for international support for the Juba Peace Talks, and calling on the Lord’s Resistance Army to immediately release children, women and non-combatants was also commended.

DUMISANI KUMALO (South Africa) said that, despite progress made in ending the use of children in armed conflict, the recent escalation of violence in the Middle East and in other regions had resulted in the recruitment and use of child soldiers, the killing and maiming of children, rape, abductions and attacks against schools and hospitals. Concerted efforts should be made by all parties to mitigate and prevent further violations through dialogue and active participation of all stakeholders. The monitoring and reporting mechanism should be supported so that it could effectively address the widespread impact of armed conflict on children, especially in the area of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation.

He said much needed to be done on the ground to protect children from the devastating impact of armed conflict. It was, therefore, disturbing that sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel still continued. A positive development, however, was the deployment, on a case-by-case basis, of child protection advisers. Sustained investment in health and social infrastructures, as well as education and skills training, would ensure successful integration of children and prevent their re-recruitment. Special attention should be given to girl children that had been exploited by armed forces. A deeper understanding of the acute vulnerability of girls in armed conflict should inform more gender-sensitive strategies.

ROMAN KIRN (Slovenia), on behalf of the Human Security Network, said the Secretary-General’s report had highlighted new situations of great concern, such as child victims of war following recent violence in Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The detailed nature of the report, relating to situations on the Council’s agenda as well as those outside its formal purview, was welcomed. Both annex I and II lists were useful, especially since they helped identify non-State actors, as well. The report also enabled a better understanding of inter-linkages, such as the migratory nature of recruitment within regions.

On other cross-thematic issues, he said the Human Security Network welcomed measures to combat sexual exploitation by peacekeeping personnel. Yet, as abuses persisted, both raising awareness and the disciplining of perpetrators must continue. In addition, reliable, accurate and objective monitoring was essential. At the same time, the Network looked forward to the study currently being undertaken by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to help improve the efficiency of the work of the child protection advisers, and believed that the inclusion of specific child protection expertise within the United Nations needed to continue. Attention on gender-based violations, especially those directed at girl associated with armed
groups, must be heightened. Also, parties that continued to commit violations against children in defiance of Council resolutions must be dealt with effectively. All parts of the world giving cause for concern needed to be addressed, especially the Middle East.

JORGE SKINNER-KLÉE (Guatemala) said he was pleased to see the working group’s condemnation of the recruitment of child soldiers. He trusted that the working group’s recommendations would be implemented, as it was an effective way of combating the horrendous practice. He had several concerns, however, including that a greater workload could work against the working group’s effectiveness. His delegation agreed with the need to expand the criteria the working group currently used to include other violations and serious crimes, such as maiming, rape, abduction and the denial of humanitarian access.

Despite the various efforts made, the international community continued to hear horrendous tales of children affected by armed conflict, he continued. Concrete actions were needed against parties who continued to carry out grave violations against children. No one could resolve the sad situation alone. The international community’s full assistance was needed. He urged the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to include information on its efforts to follow-up on resolution 1612.

PRASAD KARIYAWASAM (Sri Lanka) said his country had a zero-tolerance policy on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Discovering that a local armed group -- LTTE -- was engaged in recruiting and using children in battle, every possible action had been taken to persuade the group to cease that deplorable practice. The Council should seriously consider targeted punitive action against repeat offenders such as LTTE, which had also been designated by many States as a terrorist group. Furthermore, Sri Lanka supported the provision reflected in numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions that specifically identified the “recruitment and use of children in armed conflict” as the first category of violations, separate from “other violations and abuses”. The Council must maintain its focus on the first category of violations, to ensure that it receives undiminished attention, rather than give equal weight to all categories of violations against children, as the Secretary-General’s report had recommended.

He added that the report had also contained an erroneous observation, counting Sri Lanka among “the seven situations that were designated as priorities for the first phase of implementation”. The decision to be considered first was voluntary and had not been intended to change the order of chronological precedence or the time line set by resolution 1612 (2005), which required addressing the situations in annex I before considering those in annex II. Also, resolution 1612 requested an independent review of the monitoring and reporting mechanism by July, while the report called for the review by OIOS to be presented in November. As for the recommendation to “expand the call for action plans to all situations of concern”, Sri Lanka believed it should only take place following the independent review, and that existing plans should be solidified first, accompanied by corresponding technical, financial and political support.

He said that a meaningful review required not only an assessment of the mechanism’s administrative effectiveness, but should go beyond the mandate of OIOS to study gaps and overlaps in United Nations processes and the system’s overall integrity. The affected States should also be involved in the review, and greater dialogue between the Secretary-General and concerned Member States in the preparation of programmes and policies with regard to the issue was called for. Indeed, “megaphone advocacy” would not curb the menace of child
recruitment and abuse, and unbridled expansion of the mandate could dilute attention on the core issue of concern. As an affected State, Sri Lanka appealed to others not to miss the woods for the trees.

REZLAN ISHAR JENIE (Indonesia) said children should be arming themselves with education and the social skills needed to become productive members of stable, peaceful and well-governed societies. The continued availability of small arms and light weapons, which enabled the recruitment of child soldiers, should be strongly curtailed. The Council should also act urgently to prevent the loss of life of children in the Middle East, especially those who were victims of the unresolved Palestinian problem. More detailed information should be gathered on combatants who crossed borders to recruit and use children in armed conflict, as well as on the establishment of new centres of recruitment by illegal armed groups.

He said the Peacebuilding Commission should become involved in preventing the recruitment of child soldiers, and States should be encouraged to adhere to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a means of eliminating that practice. It would be equally helpful for appropriate national legislation to shield children at risk by prohibiting their recruitment in the first place. In addition, it was imperative that peacekeepers uphold the trust of the population they served, by curbing the occurrence of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Indonesia was pleased to see that troop-contributing countries were also being mobilized to help deal with the problem. The Security Council should consider expanding its focus to include all categories of violations against children, and such considerations should involve the wider participation of Member States, as it would increase sensitivity to the issue and strengthen commitment. It was also vital that adequate resources and funding be available to all those combating the involvement of children in armed conflict.

JOHN McNEE (Canada) said 9 November 2006 -- the start date of the International Criminal Court’s trial for former Democratic Republic of the Congo militia leader Thomas Lubanga -- had been a historic day. Canada welcomed that important first step in combating impunity. He called on the international community to support the work of the Court and national courts as they brought to justice those who perpetrated serious international crimes, including those committed against children. To end the culture of impunity, it was essential that the Council apply targeted measures against persistent violators. The working group’s recommendations to the Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were a good example of both cooperative measures and targeted sanctions. The challenge now was for the Council to turn clear recommendations into action. Canada called on the Council to implement the sanctions recommended, including conducting expert-level missions to assess progress.

Congratulating the working group on meeting an ambitious agenda, he noted that, in addition to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conclusions on the Sudan had also been adopted. The situations in Côte d’Ivoire and Burundi had been considered, soon to be followed by Sri Lanka and Nepal. He encouraged the Council to stay appraised of the deteriorating human rights situation in Sri Lanka and to pursue recommended action on the Sudan to combat impunity there. While some progress had been made over the past year, particularly in Uganda, many situations had deteriorated and new ones reported. In particular, sexual violence against girls was still widely reported by the Secretary-General. It was critical that the Working Group continue to focus on the establishment of monitoring and reporting in all situations of concern and extend the mandate of the mechanism to include all six categories of grave violations against children, beyond their recruitment and use as soldiers.
Efforts to address protection needs on the ground must be mutually reinforcing, he said. States, including Council members, must demonstrate their willingness to ensure that populations at risk had access at all times to the greatest protection possible, that perpetrators of abuse would be held accountable for their actions, and that advocacy, monitoring and capacity-building become the watch words for the Council’s work. Multilateralism, in short, must deliver results.

KYAW TINT SWE (Myanmar) said the Myanmar Armed Forces was an all-volunteer army, and those entering military service did so of their own free will. As stipulated by the Myanmar Defence Service Act and a War Office Council directive, the country did not recruit persons under the age of 18 into the military. When recruits were found to be underage, they were discharged from the military. To effectively implement those rules, a high-level Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Under-Aged Children was established in January 2004, and a plan of action formulated and implemented in October 2004. In addition, the Government was also implementing measures to promote public awareness of the Child Law of 1993, adopted in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been translated into the languages of major national races and distributed widely. The high-level Committee had contributed to stricter enforcement of the recruitment criteria. Discharging underage children, an action that had been in place for many years, became more pronounced once the plan of action was launched.

He said an open debate in July in Myanmar had led to further developments in the prevention of military recruitment of underage children. Education and public awareness activities had also been extensively carried out, with the personal involvement of the Judge Advocate General and the Director of the Directorate of Military Strength, who were members of the high-level Committee. When the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF visited Myanmar in August 2006, matters relating to the protection of children, including efforts by the Government to prevent recruitment of underage children, had been discussed. Unfortunately, he was not able to inspect the military recruitment centres due to time constraints, but a UNDP Resident Representative and a UNICEF Representative were later able to visit one, where they held discussions with new recruits. Subsequently, the UNICEF Representative wrote a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressing the belief that the recruitment procedure had been fully implemented.

He said that he had met the Special Representative a number of times, and had provided her with photographic records of newly recruited underage soldiers who were discharged from military service. However, the report of the Secretary-General did not reflect all the information provided by the Government and continued to lack accuracy and objectivity. It also included unfounded allegations. While it complied with requests of non-State armed groups to be removed from the list, it failed to mention the official request of the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to delete Tatmadaw (Kyi) from the list. Finally, in working to protect children, United Nations agencies must strictly observe provisions in Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) that described the roles of national Governments and those of United Nations and civil society actors. Cooperation between the United Nations and the concerned Government was important, especially in the monitoring of non-State armed groups.

ROBERT HILL (Australia) welcomed the Security Council’s ongoing focus on children and armed conflict, and encouraged efforts to sustain momentum and progress achieved to date on Security Council resolution 1612. Safe and unhindered access was paramount to the ongoing
implementation of the resolution, and it was a common impediment cited in the Secretary-General’s report. He agreed that equal weight should be given to all categories of grave violations, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, attacks upon schools, abductions, and denial of access to humanitarian assistance.

Further, he said, no individuals or group could be “outside the law” and he noted the charges against one individual by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court regarding enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 years and using them to participate in active hostilities. That case was a landmark in the fight against impunity for those crimes and it built upon the jurisprudence of other international criminal tribunals, such as the Sierra Leone Special Court, which had confirmed in 2004 that recruitment of child soldiers entailed individual criminal responsibility.

He referred to Australia’s support of measures to mitigate the impact of conflict on children in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the cases of Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Mindanao in the Philippines. He commended the role of UNICEF in those and similar situations in ensuring that children’s rights were upheld and that the physical and emotional needs of children affected by armed conflict were met. He supported the call of the Special Representative to look beyond “band-aid” solutions and instead find long-term development responses that comprehensively addressed the critical reintegration and rehabilitation needs of children affected by armed conflict. He was also pleased to report Australia’s deposit of its instrument of ratification for the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He called upon States to make serious efforts to report, in detail, violations of children’s rights and to implement action plans to prevent the abuse of children and alleviate their suffering in times of armed conflict.

MADHU RAMAN ACHARYA (Nepal) noted the Secretary-General’s report described some specific references with regard to children and armed conflict in Nepal. While there was no denying the fact that children in Nepal had suffered much over a decade of armed conflict, the situation had changed remarkably since the establishment of the democratic Government after the successful People’s Movement last April and the signing of peace agreements. The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord on 21 November 2006 had put an end to the decade-old armed conflict in Nepal, paving the way for the holding of elections to the Constituent Assembly by mid-June 2007.

He said the Comprehensive Peace Accord had also unleashed opportunities for lasting peace and stability, the rule of law, multiparty democracy, as well as the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. Among other things, the peace accord provided for special protection of the rights of children from all forms of violation. It also included a provision not to conscript or use children who were aged 18 or below in the Armed Forces. In accordance with the agreements, Nepal had sought the United Nations continued assistance, including in human rights monitoring. He hoped the United Nations would be able to provide the necessary assistance, as requested by Nepal, as quickly as possible, to support the momentum of the home-grown peace process and to advance the national efforts towards lasting peace.

Nepal was fully committed to protecting and promoting the rights of children, he said. The recruitment of children into military service was prohibited by law. The Government was also fully committed to the reintegration of separated children and child soldiers in their family and society by providing them with education and other services. Nepal welcomed the Secretary-General’s recommendation that adequate resources and funding be made available to national
governments, the United Nations and its partners, for the rehabilitation and reintegration of all children who had been associated with the armed forces. The Secretary-General’s report contained certain recommendations, which could ideally be taken up by other relevant treaty bodies and mechanisms of the United Nations, not by the Security Council itself.

IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said he was heartened that the monitoring and reporting mechanism had been put in place, particularly since the process had been preceded by close collaboration between key stakeholders. In situations of armed conflict, children were often the worst sufferers, yet were also the most ignored. To usher in an “era of the application” of child protection standards, the Council must urge Governments and non-State actors to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Rome Statute, related provisions of the International Labour Organization Convention and the Ottawa Convention against anti-personnel mines. It must also expand its focus to include all categories of violations against children, while noting that violence against children was exacerbated in areas of foreign occupation. Indeed, Bangladesh was concerned about recent conflicts in the Middle East that had a significant impact on children. There was an urgent need to extend to those children the fullest protection.

He said that, as a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, Bangladesh had been vigilant in observing the provisions of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). International financial institutions were urged to turn their attention to the provision of education and health care to children in conflict-ridden areas, while imparting a sense of ownership and long-term sustainability. Regional and subregional organizations should become more involved in the peacebuilding process, and donors were encouraged to continue their generosity. Gender-based violence must be given high priority, with zero tolerance given to the perpetrators of violence towards girls. To avoid the perpetuation of violence, the values of the “culture of peace” must be inculcated in both young and old alike. In support of that goal, Bangladesh tabled every year a resolution on the International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. He hoped the international community would provide that resolution with full support this year.

IVÁN ROMERO-MARTÍNEZ (Honduras) said he was pleased to note that the Council had placed a priority on the rights of children in the last decade, particularly those affected by armed conflict. The framework established by resolution 1612 had allowed for the construction of a legal framework, which represented a step forward in finding a solution to a complex problem. Among the most important legal instruments were the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Statute of the International Criminal Court. He was pleased, in particular, with the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as the encouragement to set up coordination mechanisms among the different United Nations agencies. That would guarantee an effective protection policy for children, whose smiles were being marked by the tragedy of violence. It would also revive hope for a new, just world.

Socio-economic conditions affected children greatly, subjecting them to harsh environments, he said. He hoped that the dreams of children for a better future would be realized in the pursuit of world peace and the enforcement of their fundamental rights.

MONA JUUL (Norway) said the Council’s real test over the next year would be how it could contribute tangibly to the momentum of the international community in its attempt to stop the use of child soldiers. Welcoming the Council’s more comprehensive framework in dealing with the children and armed conflict agenda, she said the working group could play an important role
in developing response strategies and suggesting practical measures based on country reports. Another significant development related to the reporting and monitoring system. Information should be provided on the practices of all parties to armed conflict, including Government forces, Government linked paramilitary groups and non-State armed groups as a basis for action. Regular reports by the country-level taskforces must be followed up by the provision of adequate resources.

Civil society and non-governmental organizations could play an important role in the reporting and monitoring system, she said, adding that their role should go beyond providing information on violations and abuses against children. In the follow-up to the monitoring and reporting system, Norway encouraged a broader application to cover all situations wherever children were at risk. The implementation of time-bound action plans by countries to end the practice of forced recruitment and use of child soldiers was, regrettably, lagging behind. Work was needed to make better use of action plans and to improve their effectiveness. She supported the Secretary-General's proposal to expand the call for action plans to all situations of concern.

While there was reason for serious concern, there was also cause for careful optimism, she said. On the concern side, she said the international community had witnessed serious setbacks affecting the civilian population, including children in the Middle East region. Norway welcomed, however, the cessation of hostilities agreement between the Lord's Resistance Army and Uganda's Government. She called on the LRA to release all women and children in captivity in accordance with resolutions 1612 and 1325. Norway had also warmly welcomed the news that the parties to the conflict in Nepal had signed a comprehensive peace agreement. Such developments underscored the potential for effective implementation of resolution 1612. Norway would continue to provide resources and funding for demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation of children who had been associated with armed forces. A perspective of gender and community were both crucial. It was also vital to recognize and support the contribution children and young people themselves could make in national efforts to build peace.

DANIEL CARMON (Israel) said his country assigned a high priority to the protection of children and looked forward to a visit from the Special Representative some time soon. In the region surrounding Israel, children had been recruited for terror attacks and violence, such as to conduct suicide bombings. Children had also been used as human shields, and their bedrooms turned into bomb-making factories, schools as weapons storehouses and kindergartens into terrorist safe houses. To combat such a disturbing phenomenon, more attention must be paid to incitement by communal and political leaders, for instance in the Palestinian Authority. Youth were extremely impressionable and such forms of incitement were harmful.

He said that Israel regretted that the severity of that issue had not been reflected in the Secretary-General's report, since the incitement of children was no less dangerous than terrorism. He also regretted the omission of the fact that children had been recruited by Palestinian terrorists to carry out attacks, which was a reality documented by Israel and human rights groups. Terrorism attacks in northern Israel by Hizbollah, and in the south by Palestinian terrorists had blanketed civilian life in Israel since early summer. The children in Israel's north had gone on to rebuild their lives, but children in Israel's south continued to suffer from the Palestinian terror. The psychological toll that terrorism had levied on children was only beginning to be understood. In general, record numbers of teenage students in the north had dropped out of school due to post-traumatic stress. In the south, exceptionally high levels of anxiety among children had led to signs of trauma and regression, like bed-wetting and
nightmares. The suffering of all children must be acknowledged, whether Lebanese, Israeli or Palestinian.

He said denying the suffering of one side undermined the prospects of mutual understanding, but the world had seen exactly that in the passing of one-sided resolutions at the Human Rights Council and at the General Assembly. In addition, statements made earlier in the meeting, that more civilians — including children — were killed than combatants during the summer’s conflict were troubling and questionable. In fact, Hizbollah’s firing of weapons from civilian areas had distorted the distinction between civilians and terrorists, and the obscurity surrounding the number of civilians or terrorists killed during the conflict simply illustrated that point. The underlying tensions in the region the hatred and incitement and Hamas’ disregard for its internationally accepted obligations — recognition of Israel, renouncing violence and terror and abiding by previous agreements — must be addressed.

MAGED ABDELAZIZ (Egypt) said, although the report mentioned the violence directed at children in Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, no reference was included on how to end such a shameful situation. The Special Representative had not been given the chance to visit Lebanon and Israel, assess the situation and to present findings to the Security Council working group. No monitoring and reporting mechanism had been established, even though Palestine and Lebanon were listed as Security Council agenda items, while Nepal and Sri Lanka — both areas with monitoring mechanisms — were not. Egypt stressed the need for a wide mandate for the fact-finding mission to be dispatched to the Palestinian Territory, pursuant to General Assembly’s tenth Emergency Special Session, and the Secretary-General was called on to send his Special Representative to Lebanon, as well. Both situations should be thoroughly reflected in the next report on children and armed conflict.

Also, he said there was an urgent need for a significant United Nations role to deal with Iraqi child victims. A special mechanism should be established to guarantee that the multinational forces abided by the same code of conduct and moral standards that applied to the United Nations peacekeeping mission, especially in dealing with children and to prevent all manner of violence against them, as mentioned in the report. As for implementing action plans, the report had not outlined any activities to progress the situation in Liberia, Myanmar, Palestine or Lebanon, in contrast to the situations in Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda, which raised questions on the criteria of selection.

He went on to say that it was illogical to, on the one hand, use the veto power against resolutions and neglect the need to achieve political settlement, while expecting, on the other hand, the concerned parties to create action plans to protect children. Also, the Security Council should not proclaim itself solely responsible for the protection of children in armed conflict, since some violations of children’s rights fell under the domain of the General Assembly’s Third Committee. There was also a need to set effective protection policies within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, at Headquarters and in the field.

JEAN-MARIE EHOUZOU (Benin) said adoption of resolution 1612, which had been co-sponsored by Benin and France, set in motion implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the working group to examine its reports. He was pleased to note that the Council and the Secretariat, as well as the United Nations agencies, had acted together with Member States and non-governmental organizations to operationalize the mechanism and run the working group effectively. He was concerned to note, however, the risks of personnel in
accessing conflict zones. The parties concerned must not block the international community’s efforts to protect children. The international community must become organized in its response. He agreed that the Council must pay equal attention to all countries concerned and to all forms of violations. He was grateful to those countries that had voluntarily coordinated with the working group.

He also called on the Council to adopt a positive interpretation of the resolution and act more effectively in promoting the protection of children by recognizing the global nature of the mechanism. The working group should establish its work programme for 2007 on that basis. The group should consider all reports produced by the mechanism. The action plan for parties to armed conflict called for in resolution 1539 must be insisted on in all countries concerned. Parties who presented action plans but did not implement them were just as much to be reproached as those without action plans. He awaited completion of initial procedures and called on governments to cooperate with the International Criminal Court in order to strengthen its effectiveness as deterrence. The United Nations should support progress by supporting peace processes, as the return of peace was essential for protecting children.

In the case of West Africa, he said borders were porous and children affected in one country could bring about destabilization of other areas, given their mobility. The Council must educate the international community on the need to help children who had been demobilized by parties to a conflict. The establishment of intake agencies could not be left up to the affected communities alone. Benin approved the Secretary-General’s recommendation calling for a comprehensive study of all questions, especially the mobilization of human and financial resources to appropriately reply to the situation of children in armed conflict.

HAMID AL-BAYATI (Iraq) said it was obvious that the international community felt a strong sense of responsibility to end the suffering of children during times of armed conflict. UNICEF’s statistics for 2006 demonstrated the extent of the catastrophe: more than 250 million children had been recruited in armed conflicts; 140 million had been made orphans as a result of war; and many more were held captive, made victims of sexual exploitation or were sold. The Secretary-General’s report also talked of Iraq, but, in light of current difficulties, it was difficult to speak accurately about the suffering of children in that country, who bore the brunt of terrorism, as well as three decades of internal and international conflicts and 13 years of sanctions. Iraqi children had also become targets of criminal groups, prompting the Security Council to adopt resolution 1618 (2005) condemning terrorist operations in Iraq, including the killing of children, which was often a way to sow sectarian violence throughout the country.

He said it was clear that confronting the dangers against children was the responsibility of the Iraqi Government, to be carried out with international support. Indeed, the Government had adopted mechanisms in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Civil society, too, was trying to improve the daily lives of children, but the deteriorating security situation was a big obstacle. Friends of the country must offer more support to its Government to enable national reconciliation. To undertake efforts to protect the rights of children at a time when the security situation was deteriorating was only a dream.

CAROLINE ZIADE (Lebanon) said, while the facts on the ground from Israel’s aggression this past summer had been well documented, the emotional and collective trauma was much more difficult to relay. The massacres at Qana II, Marwaheen and Chiah were already etched in history as another example of Israel’s intentions towards Lebanon’s youth. There had been 360 child fatalities with hundreds more suffering from permanent injuries and disabilities. Some
50 schools had been destroyed, with around 300 more needing repair. Primary health-care facilities in many parts of the country had been annihilated. With so much destruction, Lebanon must once again undergo the difficult task of recovery.

The Israeli Defence Forces had argued that the infrastructure would be used by Hizbollah, she said. That twisted logic had not fooled anyone. While analysing the various aspects of the impact on life during the summer’s war on Lebanon, the United Nations and the Human Rights Commission had concluded that the damage inflicted on some infrastructure had been done for the sake of destruction. The report also accused Israel of not providing local civilians with effective warning, as required under international human law. About one quarter of the Lebanese population had been displaced from their homes and attacked as they had fled.

Today, Lebanon’s biggest challenge remained the removal of the 1.2 million cluster bombs that Israel had left behind and the tracking and removing of mines that Israel had planted, she said. Over 22 people had died and 135 had been injured since the cessation of hostilities. The cluster munitions had prevented the harvest of summer and fall crops in South Lebanon, a region in which agriculture comprised some 70 per cent of the economy. They had equally prevented the planting of winter crops, resulting in an entirely failed agricultural year and a direct challenge to the country’s food security. Lebanese children should not have been destined for martyrdom. Lebanese children, like all children of the world, should have the right to live and to dream in a better tomorrow.

LAXANACHANTORN LAOHAPHAN (Thailand) said her country’s commitment to the issue had been reaffirmed by its ratification early this year of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Child. Thailand welcomed progress in implementing resolution 1612 and welcomed also the Secretary-General’s recommendation to give equal care and attention to children in armed conflict in all situations, including sexual violence committed against children in situations of armed conflict. In addition to the Council’s role, the role of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council must also be fully recognized. Additional resources were needed for effective and sustainable disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. National ownership and involvement were prerequisites for success in addressing the situation of children in armed conflict. More important, collective efforts needed to be on a rights-based approach.

While supporting the work of the Special Representative, she emphasized that in undertaking her work, the Special Representative should exercise the utmost care to ensure the full accuracy of reports. Unverifiable allegations should be omitted from reports. Thailand did not have child soldiers or a situation of children in armed conflict. Thailand had made its best effort to render full protection to children affected by armed conflict from neighbouring countries. Paragraphs 60 to 62 of the report contained inaccurate information. In particular, the working group mentioned in paragraph 61 had not been set up by the Council. Naming it the Thailand Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict was definitely misleading. Thailand had conveyed that concern to United Nations agencies in Bangkok and appreciated the fact that a corrigendum would be issued to address the concern.

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