



UGANDA

**Permanent Mission of Uganda
To the United Nations
New York**

Tel : (212) 949 – 0110

Fax : (212) 687 - 4517

**STATEMENT
BY
AMB. RICHARD NDUHUURA
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
AT THE
SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE
ON
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

**MARCH 7, 2014
New York**

Please check against delivery

Madam, President,

I take this opportunity to congratulate you and your country-Luxembourg upon assumption of the Security Council Presidency of this month and for organizing this important open debate on children and Armed Conflict.

The challenge of protecting the rights and well-being of children during conflict and ensuring attention to their educational, health, rehabilitation and nutritional needs in post-conflict periods is daunting. Too frequently, the absence of participation by advocates of youths and children during peace negotiations means that these concerns are given short shrift or, quite often, completely ignored.

Addressing the needs is not just a matter of fairness, equity or humanitarianism; it is key to building and maintaining lasting peace. Refusal to respect children's rights and to account for abuses committed against children during wartime can put a cynicism at the heart of attempts to restore rule of law and justice. Failure to show tangible improvements in the lives of children erodes the support of the general population and, in particular groups for a peace process perceived as representing only the interests of the warring parties themselves.

Rampant youth unemployment, resulting in mass alienation of young men in particular, is the surest way to produce a ready reserve of recruits for fanatical leaders like Joseph Kony seeking to lure them into combat in armed rebellion.

Madam President,

Beyond the impact on peace and stability, there is indeed the human dimension of the tragedy when children and conflict collide. Go into any camp for demobilizing soldiers in the context of a peace process and you are sure to find large numbers of young people under the age of maturity, even where governments and rebel leaders tell you with straight faces that they did not use child soldiers. Many of these young people are used as bearers, cooks, messengers and sex slaves, but some of them were also involved in combat, carried guns that are almost as big as they are, and took human lives.

Besides child soldiers, all children are victims of large-scale armed conflict. They are victims when the government cannot or will not ensure adequate funding for schools and health clinics, resulting in very low school participation rates, high maternal and infant mortality rates, and other weak social indicators. They are displaced in huge numbers and live in camps that are desperate breeding grounds for alcohol and drug abuse, tuberculosis, cholera, and domestic and

sexual abuse. They subsist on thin gruel provided by international relief agencies. They are victims of landmines frequently planted randomly in areas where children walk and play.

Madam President,

Children are the future of the world, and they represent humankind's hopes for tomorrow. However, as the most vulnerable group, they are often adversely affected by armed conflict. All countries and parties have an obligation to try their best to protect children from the harm of armed conflict. In recent years, the United Nations and Regional Organizations adopted a series of measures to promote the protection of children in armed conflict. They have also achieved positive results in this area including by assisting countries emerging from conflict to give full consideration to the special needs of children as part of their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. In addition, some of the peace agreements that the United Nations and Regional Organizations like African Union have promoted or participated in contain provisions on the protection of children. And some of the countries concerned have taken active steps to provide legislative safeguards for the protection of children.

Despite the progress in the protection of children in armed conflict, countless children continue to suffer from the effects of such conflict. The international community must make sustained efforts to truly change the situation. The United Nations should document its experience in the area of protecting children during peacekeeping operations and give it special treatment so that future peacekeeping operations can benefit from that experience. At the same time, all parties to armed conflicts should strive to meet their obligations under relevant international law and to respect and safeguard the legitimate rights of children. Post-conflict reconstruction should solve the problem by prioritizing the return of children to their families, schools and communities and by providing sufficient resources to that end.

Madam President,

The reintegration of child soldiers' deprived of their right to education and their chances of balanced development - in a word, cheated of their future - these children are, above all, victims; but, given that they are without any family or social guidance, we must also prevent them from becoming a potential factor in the recurrence of crises. No country emerging from war can, without risk, leave its young people on the sidelines without any future, knowing only the culture of violence. Programmes for disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating combatants must take into account the specific needs of children, particularly young girls who are often even more severely affected than boys and whose

reintegration is even more difficult. Experience shows - this is notably the case in conflict prone areas - that enlistments are often re-enlistments: for want of adequate care and support after demobilization, children are again enrolled in the ranks of armed groups. The "reintegration" segment is often the poor relation in a DDR programme, for want of the necessary financing and also of satisfactory coordination between all the actors concerned. In this respect, there's an urgent need for states recovering from conflicts to institutionalize programmes like DDR to be responsible for ensuring the consistency of the measures taken on the ground.

Madam President,

In conclusion it is vital that we constantly think about what will have an impact on the ground in terms of protection and participation of children. Girls must be free to attend schools without risking social alienation or, worse, acid being thrown in their faces. Young boys and girls kidnapped or coerced into joining armed forces must be freed to live the rest of their lives without the stigma or trauma of those early years shadowing their future. All children must be able to view the ground as a place to run and play, not as a source of every-present danger from the presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

I thank you for your attention.