



Statement

By

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Permanent Representative of Lebanon

to the United Nations

at the

Security Council

Open Debate

“Children and armed conflict”.

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UN Security Council High-Level Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

Tuesday, 19 July 2022, 10:00 am

Statement by Ambassador Amal Mudallali

Thank you, Mr. President,

At the outset I would like to congratulate Brazil on assuming the Presidency of the Security Council for this month and for organizing this timely debate.

I seize this opportunity to congratulate Albania on their successful presidency of the Council last month.

Mr. President,

We thank the briefers and we commend the leadership of Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict **Virginia Gamba** as well as UNICEF Executive Director **Catherine Russel** and assure them of our full support.

As Vice President of UNICEF during this year, Lebanon, and myself personally, attach great importance to today's open debate.

Mr. President,

The report of the Secretary General on children and armed conflicts, paints a grim picture.

The numbers of violations against children in conflicts for the past year are terrifying. Almost 24,000 verified grave violations were committed against children in conflict, in 2021 only. It is heartbreaking to see that 2,500 children were killed and 5,555 were maimed in conflicts. These are the reported ones.

The UNICEF report on the 25 Years of Children and Armed Conflict, also concurs with these figures and highlights that, between 2016 and 2020 a "staggering average of 71 verified grave violations a day, have been committed against children by parties to conflicts".

During the launch of the UNICEF report, Executive Director Russel observed that "*between 2005 and 2020 the UN verified more than a quarter million violations against children in situations of armed conflict*".

In Afghanistan alone, almost 33,000 children have been killed and maimed over the past 20 years, according to Save the Children.

The Secretary General's report noted that for Palestinian children, 2021 was the deadliest year on record since 2014, with Israeli forces killing 78 Palestinian children and injuring 982.

In Syria, and according to the Human Rights Commissioner **Michelle Bachelet**, 27,126 children were killed between March 2011 and March 2021. Thousands of children are killed or abused every day in the over two dozen conflicts around the world.

Mr. President,

Girls deserve our particular attention today. As noted in the Secretary General's report, and in Ms. Gambia's briefing today, the number of girls who were killed or maimed or who were subjected to abduction and sexual violence has increased. In some contexts, like Afghanistan for example, the situation of girls is particularly dire. The denial of their basic rights, including their right to education is unacceptable. Many girls are also being forcibly married, so that the family has one less mouth to feed.

Mr. President,

We have to admit that we failed to protect children around the world despite all the conventions and the legislations and action plans that are supposed to protect them especially in conflict. We failed not because these conventions are not well written or lacked the seriousness that this matter warrants. We failed because there is no will to implement them. The convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified treaty in history, a staggering 196 countries ratified it. One has to admit that it made a difference but it is not enough difference to protect children in conflict from being the first victims.

We need to find strong instruments of implementation that can transform these conventions that are supposed to protect children from a legal document to a living practice in every corner of earth where there is a conflict. These conventions need teeth to be able to succeed at their mission.

We need to be creative and more serious in implementing the humanitarian conventions and laws that protect children. Some people refer to the UN's annual list of shame of those responsible for grave violations against children in conflict as a useful tool in preventing violations.

Mr. President,

Those who violate the rights of children, kill and maim or recruit children and abuse children have no shame. You cannot shame them. You need to hold them responsible, designate them as children's killers and abusers so even if they run, they cannot hide from international justice. We need to deny impunity to those who violate the rights of children. We need to have accountability for the perpetrators and justice for all the children that suffered at their hands.

The current status quo is not tenable anymore. Children should be made off limits to war mongers. Children need pens not guns, children need warm beds not bullets in their heads, they need schools not bombs in their playgrounds and backyards. Children need peace. This should become our utmost priority here at the UN and elsewhere around the world. This Council is where the solution starts, and the problem ends. You have the power, exercise it for the sake of the children.

I thank you Mr. President.