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STATEMENT

BY

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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

**74th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

AT

THE SECURITY COUNCIL

ON

**THE OPEN DEBATE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED
CONFLICT**

**NEW YORK
23 JUNE 2020**

(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

1. I congratulate you on the assumption of France to the Presidency of the Security Council for the month of June 2020 and thank you for organizing this important annual Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict.
2. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the civil society briefer, for their insightful briefings. I further thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on children and armed conflict.

Mr. President,

3. As we mark 15 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the Working Group of the Security Council on children and armed conflict, it is important to recognize the progress that has been made in this field since 2005. Tangible results have been achieved to prevent violations against children in situations of armed conflict: 32 action plans have been signed, more than 155,000 children from parties to conflict have been released and 12 armed forces and groups have been removed from the Secretary-General's annual report's annexes through the implementation and completion of action plans. The Working Group of the Security Council has also conducted essential work, notably in the adoption of over 60 country-specific recommendations on children and armed conflict.
4. Nevertheless, despite this progress and despite the existence of relevant legal norms around the world, grave violations against children in conflicts continue unabated. As outlined in the latest report of the Secretary-General, in 2019, the UN verified over 25,000 grave violations against children in 19 conflicts. Some 7,747 children were verified as having been recruited and used, mostly by non-State actors. Some 10,173 children were verified as having been killed and maimed.
5. The report of the Secretary-General further highlights 735 verified cases of rape or other forms of sexual violence committed against children. The Secretary-General warns that these crimes are vastly underreported. In this regard, we reiterate our support and commitment to the various Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda resolutions adopted by the Security Council, including most recently Security Council Resolution 2467 which

amongst others further encourages Member States to ensure that prevention and responses to sexual violence in conflict are non-discriminatory and specific, and respect the rights and prioritize the needs of survivors, including vulnerable or targeted groups.

6. I take this opportunity to remind Members of the importance of accountability for all crimes committed against children. As the report of the Secretary-General warns, “the lack of protection, of holistic services for survivors and of accountability mechanisms disincentivize survivors, their families and witnesses from reporting violations”. We, as an international community, must do far better in this domain.

Mr. President,

7. Namibia also wishes to highlight the increased attacks against schools. As the concept note prepared by France highlights “access to safe, quality education is one of the critical needs of children affected by armed conflict. It is fundamental both to children’s well-being and to the fulfillment of their most basic rights”. Attacks against schools, and therefore their closure, are fertile ground for the forced recruitment of young people by armed groups. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and students cannot be underestimated either.

Mr. President,

8. Many of the listed parties, in the annex of the Secretary-General’s report, that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children are from the African continent. As part of the AU Agenda 2063 and its ten-year implementation plans, through its targets, the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration of 26 May 2013, through the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020 “*decided not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans*” and therefore to silence the guns by 2020. As the above numbers demonstrate, ensuring the silencing of the guns on the African continent is essential, most notably to protect children and future generations of the continent.
9. Namibia takes this opportunity to recognize and welcome the parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children, notably the State actors from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan.

Mr. President,

10. This year also marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Namibia ratified this all-encompassing, vital Protocol in 2002. Namibia has taken other important steps to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict. In August 1999, under the Namibian Presidency of the Security Council, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1261 – the first resolution of the Council on the targeting of children in armed conflict, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Furthermore, Article 15 of the 1990 Namibian Constitution enshrines children’s rights. Article 15.2 notes that “*Children are entitled to be protected from economic exploitation and shall not be employed in or required to perform work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education, or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development*”. Namibia has also finalized the operationalization of the Child Care and Protection Act 3 of 2015 to further give effect to the rights of children as contained in the Namibian Constitution and international agreements binding on Namibia.

Mr. President,

11. To conclude, I wish to underscore that ensuring the protection of the lives as well as the futures of children affected by armed conflict is not only the right thing to do, but it is also in the interests of all. Children represent the future. We must ensure that they are protected.

I thank you.