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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SECURITY COUNCIL - OPEN DEBATE

CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

STATEMENT BY MR. JÖRN OLIVER EIERMANN, LEGAL ADVISER

Mr. President,

Children are among the most vulnerable individuals in need of protection from the effects of armed conflict. The recent report of the Secretary-General highlights the large increase in the number of violations compared with the previous reporting cycle (at least 6'000 verified violations by government forces and more than 15'000 by non-State armed groups). Thus, we continue to often fail to provide protection, when it is needed the most. We reiterate our strong support for the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict and for her continuous efforts to shed more light on these violations. Protecting the independence and integrity of her mandate is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility.

Mr. President,

There are numerous initiatives that enable us to enhance protection: The Safe School Declaration, supported by 76 States, including Liechtenstein, is an important commitment to continuing education during armed conflict, including by protecting schools and universities from military use. Full implementation of Security Council resolution 2286 will also go a long way to improve the situation of children in armed conflict by ensuring the protection of those providing medical services as well as healthcare facilities. Both initiatives are aimed at

counteracting the worrying trend of the increasing disregard for international humanitarian law. The Council should follow-up on these initiatives and help enforce compliance by State and non-State actors with the Geneva Conventions.

Mr. President,

We welcome that the list of parties that have committed grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict has been updated recently. Evidence-based and impartial listing is a key tool to put pressure on State and non-State actors alike to take concrete measures to ensure better protection of children. Myanmar's State and border forces (Tatmadaw Kyi) were added for the first time to the list, following the widespread and systematic violence committed against the Rohingya in Rakhine State, the destruction of their villages and their forced deportation into Bangladesh. We share the Secretary-General's deep concerns about the violations committed against children, such as the killing, maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as outlined in his recent report. We were also deeply appalled to hear from the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict about her recent trip to Myanmar and Bangladesh and her account of atrocious sexual and gender-based violence committed in a systematic manner against children, even babies. We will continue to support Bangladesh' efforts in hosting the large refugee population, but are also concerned by the reported forced disappearances of women and minors in the camps and incidents of human trafficking. Unfortunately, the Council has remained silent on these challenges, even after its own visit to the region. Accountability for the crimes committed cannot be treated as an afterthought, when it is clearly a precondition for the stated objective of enabling the return of the Rohingya refugees. We have repeatedly joined those who have expressed the view that the Council should engage in a serious discussion to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court – a decision that would be in line with the ACT Code of Conduct on mass atrocities, supported by 117 States.

Mr. President,

Sexual violence against children is one of the most chronically underreported violations during situations of armed conflict. UN monitoring and reporting mechanisms often fail to capture many of the incidences, in particular against men and boys, as illustrated in the research conducted by the All Survivors Project in situations such as Syria and the Central African Republic. We encourage more effective monitoring, documenting, investigating and reporting of violations against children, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, by all relevant UN entities. Peacekeeping and Special Political Missions as well as Fact Finding Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry need to be mandated accordingly and must be given sufficient capacities and resources to implement such mandates. At the same time, the UN should make better use of initiatives, such as the Justice Rapid Response roster, to allow for the timely deployment of experts.

I thank you.