

Protecting Children and Armed Conflict: From the UN to the Field

Remarks of Bukeni Beck, founder, AJEDI-Ka/Projet Enfants Soldats

**Ministerial Meeting of the Security Council On Children and Armed Conflict
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Mister President, Excellencies and Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I am deeply grateful to the Government of France for organizing this open debate and for inviting a member of civil society from a country that has known more than its share of armed conflict to address the Security Council. In particular, I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations for its outstanding leadership as chair of the newly-created Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

I am Bukeni Tete Waruzi Beck, founder of AJEDI-Ka/Projet Enfants Soldats, a Congolese NGO which has worked on child soldiers and children affected by conflict in the Uvira region of South Kivu since 1998. My organization is an active member of a global network working to protect children and monitor and report violations against them --- the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

It pains me to have to report that in the Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, grave human rights violations against children continue and are increasing, particularly in the rural areas. The reason is simple: no one is in these areas to protect them.

The United Nations' operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo has done much good work, but its scope remains limited. It must do a better job of responding to violations in the towns and reaching out to rural areas to stop the killing, maiming and torture of children; the recruitment of child soldiers; attacks against schools and hospitals; rape and other forms of sexual violence; the spread of HIV/AIDS; and ensure the children's access to humanitarian resources, including psychosocial support.

Monitoring and reporting abuses against children is a key start to providing them with lifesaving protection and security. But our work cannot stop there. We must also respond to reported violations and put an end to the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators.

I find it very disturbing that earlier this year, my organization followed up on violations we had reported to local authorities and discovered that nothing had been done. Local officials repeatedly tell me, "We will take care of it, no problem." Still, nothing is done.

In March, we learned that rebels in Bunia recruited 25 children for their forces. The people in my village ask, "What good are reports and fancy charts about cases involving our children if nothing is done to punish the perpetrators?" And even some of the rebel commanders with whom I have negotiated for the release of captured children laugh

when I tell them that their actions are a violation of international law. They reply, “Will the United Nations – will Kofi Annan – come here to arrest us?” with a chuckle, and add – “That is only a dream.”

Mister President, Excellencies,

The good news is that, with Resolution 1612, the Security Council and the UN system as a whole is now poised as never before to hold the thousands of perpetrators—from key leaders to lesser-known subordinates that still remain free — accountable for the crimes they have committed against children.

I would like to share some recommendations on how, together, we can affect real change in the lives of children in DRC:

- The **Security Council** must garner the political will to follow through on years of promises to hold violators accountable; and should help the DRC government create national tribunals to arrest and try child rights violators.
- **Member States** need to support the Security Council and the UN system to ensure that the tools the Security Council created to improve protection for children are implemented; member states must use their embassies and their influence in regional organizations and networks to ensure that child protection is a priority.
- **Donors** can ensure funding for organizations that engage in monitoring and reporting that includes not just disarmament and demobilization but long-term reintegration, , particularly for girl soldiers.
- **UN agencies** must prioritize and improve coordination on the ground and at headquarters for the protection of children in armed combat. The UN must also engage in equal and transparent partnerships with civil society to conduct monitoring and reporting that will ultimately result in a response to reported violations.
- The **DRC Government** must create national tribunals to arrest and punish perpetrators.

The international community has come a long way towards addressing the horrific violations against children in conflicts around the world, but the children in the DRC – and elsewhere -- are still waiting for us to put an end to these assaults and the impunity that allows this violence to continue unabated. They can wait for us no longer.

Thank you Mister President for the privilege of addressing this important session.