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Statement By The Holy See At The United Nations Security Council Open Debate On Children And Armed Conflict

By Msgr. Robert Murphy

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New York, 27 June 2024

Mr. President,

As we observe an alarming increase in conflicts around the globe, the 25th anniversary of Resolution 1261 and the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions provide a propitious occasion to underscore the disproportionate and catastrophic impact of conflict on children.

The latest report of the Secretary General reveals a disturbing trend: the percentage of children killed in armed conflict has tripled since 2022.[1] The world is currently witnessing the desperate situation of children living in populated areas affected by conflict, where the use of explosive weapons has a particularly devastating impact. It is of great concern to this Delegation that lethal weapons are increasingly being used against schools, hospitals and places of worship. These locations, which should be safe havens, especially for children, are instead becoming sites of devastation and death.

Mr. President,

It is imperative that the impact of these atrocities on children is not understated. In addition to causing severe physical injuries, explosive weapons, landmines and other remnants of war inflict profound psychological and emotional trauma. Furthermore, the proliferation of the illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons contributes significantly to violations against children, including their recruitment as child soldiers, which “remains one of the highest verified violations against children.”[2] We are witnessing the annual deprivation of thousands of children’s childhood. We are allowing them to be

robbed of their dignity which they received as a loving gift from God,[3] and which we have the fundamental duty to preserve and guarantee.

In light of the necessity to safeguard young lives, this Delegation would like to put forward the following three points for the Council's consideration.

Firstly, access to humanitarian assistance is crucial for the protection of children. The Holy See condemns any attempt to obstruct the delivery of supplies including food, water, and medicine to those suffering from the impacts of war, especially children. It is evident that any such obstructions not only violate international humanitarian law but also have a detrimental impact on the development of children.

Secondly, the cessation of the production, stockpiling, and use of indiscriminate weapons, especially in populated areas, is an essential component to limiting the impact of armed conflict on children. For this reason, this Delegation commends the United Nations Mine Action Service for its valuable work and calls for the full implementation of the Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

Thirdly, we urge the Council to guarantee the optimal utilization of all available means and tools to facilitate the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda. It is regrettable that the working group has been unable to adopt conclusions on several country reports for a period exceeding two years. This failure has concrete consequences for children in some of the most vulnerable situations.

Thank you, Mr. President.



[1] Cf. *Protection of civilians in armed conflict : report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/385*.

[2] Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Annual Report to the UN General Assembly* (2021).

[3] Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti*, n. 241.



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