

**20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Children and Armed Conflict Mandate  
8 February 2017, 10:00 am Trusteeship Council Chamber**

**Remarks by Assistant-Secretary-General Jenča**

Special Representative Leila Zerrougui, distinguished panellists, Your Excellencies,

I am delighted to be with you to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate and I thank the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Peter Thomson for convening this event.

The mandate was an important call for us all to consider that how we treat children will affect future prospects for peace. In the Department of Political Affairs, we engage in preventive diplomacy, and work in partnership with national and regional partners to address the root causes of tensions and violent conflict. Through our experience, we have learned that how a society treats young people can be at the same time an indicator for how that same society will be able to sustain peace.

Looking back 20 years, to the time when the mandate was enacted, a fundamental shift in the nature of conflict was already underway: from interstate armed conflict to conflict within States.

And indeed, the proliferation of non-state actors, the rise of violent extremism, regionalisation of conflicts and protracted unresolved conflicts together create a picture that is much more complex than we could have imagined.

Many of these complex conflicts which the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict focusses on also see engagement by the Department of Political Affairs. This includes the UN Special Political Missions or Envoys, who work in the most dangerous and difficult situations we face together. And they are the places where children continue to be at the highest risk. I am therefore deeply aware of the importance of the visits that the SRSG makes to the countries, and of the work of her office. Her reports highlight the challenges we face. They help to influence parties to conflict and to bring international attention to where it is most needed.

Yet even with the strength, commitment and expertise of this engagement, the news can be grim.

The most recent report of the SRSG finds that violations against children are tragically on the rise.

In Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, child casualties persist or have increased, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals continue. Elsewhere children are abducted or humanitarian access is denied.

Even in these most difficult settings, however, SRSG Zerrougui and her team have had some crucial successes. The Afghan government has taken significant steps to end child recruitment in its security forces, including extending the police child protection units to 21 of the 34 provinces. Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi has reiterated publicly that it is illegal to pay a military salary to anyone under 18. Monitoring and dialogue continues in the occupied Palestinian territory. And Action Plans have been developed in other places where conflicts are ongoing. Several of our Special Political Missions, including Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, have child protection advisers who work directly with mission leaders to negotiate with parties, ensure that children are protected and that the monitoring and reporting mechanisms are implemented.

This is not enough, however.

We must work to put an end to the use of military strategies that depend on violations of humanitarian law and we must support sustainable and inclusive peace processes that lead to meaningful political solutions.

The Department of Political Affairs has also worked with SRSG Zerrougui and other partners to include provisions in ceasefire agreements and peace agreements that address the concerns around the involvement of children in armed conflict and on engagement with non-state armed groups. We welcome the “Checklist for drafting children and armed conflict provisions in ceasefire and peace agreements” that was developed with UN and other partners and is a useful tool for mediators.

DPA also commends the strong engagement of the SRSG and her office in the Colombian peace process. This has contributed to important commitments by

the parties, which we hope to see implemented, to the early release of children from the FARC-EP and to the establishment of a special reintegration program tailored to their needs.

20 years ago we had not envisaged the rise of violent extremism and the situation of children in conflicts involving terrorist groups. Increasingly, violent extremist groups are abducting children and are using children to perpetuate suicide attacks or as decoys, crimes that are, for example, committed by Boko Haram in Nigeria. We emphasise now more and more that any counter-terrorism effort must incorporate appropriate responses in its treatment of children.

Finally and fundamentally, as Graça Machel so poignantly argued 20 years ago, the best way to protect children from armed conflict is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict in the first place.

We continue to believe in that goal. DPA's central priority is conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

The new Secretary-General's vision intently focuses on integrating the work of the three UN pillars, peace and security, development, and human rights, to "sustain peace". It is through working together, in a truly integrated approach, that sustaining peace and sustainable development will, together, deliver a better future for children.

The plight of children affected by armed conflict, and the dedication Ms. Zerrougui and her office have shown, inspire us. We must continue to strive, and strive harder, in our efforts to protect children and to prevent and resolve violent conflicts. In DPA we remain committed to and proud of our strong partnership with the SRSG-CAAC and we congratulate you on the twentieth anniversary of your mandate.

Thank you.