

Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. El Ghassim Wane
Remarks at the Meeting of the General Assembly on Children and Armed Conflict
New York, 8 February 2017

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here with you today, as we jointly reflect on the progress that we have made in addressing the concerns of children affected by conflict on the 20th anniversary of the 1996 Graca Machel report on the *Impact of Conflict on Children*.

Mr. President, twenty years ago the Machel Report highlighted the serious gap in addressing the plight of war affected children in peacekeeping processes and called for an emphasis on the role of peacekeeping forces in promoting and respecting children's rights. The recommendations of that report and the establishment of the Office of Special Representative for children and armed conflict have completely transformed the way that peacekeeping operations address child protection issues.

The most significant milestone for peacekeeping operations was the inclusion of child protection in our mandates by the Security Council. This paved the way for the deployment Child Protection Advisers (CPAs) in our peacekeeping operations. Today six of our peacekeeping operations have CPAs whose main task is to assist the mission leadership and all other components incorporate child protection concerns in the missions' overall work. As a result of their deployment, we have been able to integrate child protection concerns at all levels of our engagement-both political and operational and in our training programs with significant results.

At the political level, child protection is now an integral part of our political engagement:
In several of our operations, our mission leadership working closely with UNICEF and with the support of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for children and armed conflict, are leading advocacy at the highest levels of government, with armed forces and armed groups to end grave violations against children. This engagement has yielded real and concrete outcomes for children. In the Democratic Republic of Congo for example, an action plan signed with the United Nations to end the recruitment and use

of child soldiers in 2012 has resulted in the release of hundreds of children from the Congolese army. Political engagement with armed groups in the Central African Republic and Sudan has also generated commitments to end the recruitment of children and other grave violations. Last year alone our peacekeeping missions reported the release of at least 5700 children from armed groups in the D.R Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Sudan, in partnership with UNICEF and national actors.

Child Protection is also at the heart of our operational activities: In several peacekeeping operations, military and civilian personnel deployed in remote and inaccessible areas act as the eyes and ears of child protection actors on the ground. They provide critical information on grave violations to UN country taskforces, which enables the mission leadership and child protection actors to respond appropriately and support the important work of the Security Council.

In addition, to the above, child protection is increasingly mainstreamed as a cross cutting issue in the work of all mission components. In missions where they are deployed, CPAs work closely with all civilian components such as human rights, DDR, Rule of Law, Justice, POC coordinators, Women Protection Advisers, Gender and SSR to promote a child sensitive approach to their work. This has resulted in a more comprehensive response to children's issues in our operations.

Finally, child protection has been fully integrated in our pre-deployment and in-mission training programs. In 2014 we developed, jointly with UNICEF and the Special representative's office, specialized training materials for UN military peacekeepers for use by our troop contributing countries. This year, we have finalized the development of training materials for UN Police. In addition, awareness training on child protection for all military, police and civilians is a top priority in peacekeeping operations where CPAs are deployed. This year alone, approximately 6000 peacekeepers received awareness training on child protection in our operations. This training is critical because it enables our peacekeepers to effectively recognize and respond to any child protection concerns that they encounter in the field.

Despite these achievements, children continue to bear the biggest burden in conflict situations. Peacekeeping missions are operating in increasingly complex theatres and civilians including children continue to be targets of direct and deliberate attacks. In the face of these challenges, we are conscious that much more needs to be done to strengthen our overall response to their needs and to prevent violations of their rights.

We cannot overlook the recent abhorrent reports of incidents of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children by some UN peacekeepers that seriously undermine our credibility and duty to protect the most vulnerable. I would like to assure you of our firm commitment to work with Member States to promote prevention and accountability and to identify and address any gaps in our efforts to protect children.

That is why one of key priorities in the past year has been the review of the impact of our work on child protection in our missions. Last year, we concluded an assessment of our work on child protection in peacekeeping missions to identify any guidance gaps and good practices. Based on the findings of the review we partnered with DPA and DFS in the development of a new joint DPKO-DPA-DFS Policy on Child Protection with a strong focus on the obligation of the all UN peace operations personnel to lead by example by upholding and abiding by the highest normative standards on child protection. The Policy will be disseminated to all field missions for implementation. DPKO is working on the development of a Field Manual on Child Protection and training for CPAs to guide and support the implementation of the Policy on the ground. We are also looking at enhancing the child protection dimension in our overall protection of civilian efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the excellent leadership provided by the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on children and armed conflict, over the years, in building strategic partnerships with DPKO, UNICEF and the UN system as a whole that has enabled us to make progress on this important issue. I would also like to reiterate our firm commitment to the collective effort to protect children and the partnership that underpins our engagement. I am confident that with the support of

Member States, we will continue to strengthen our response and to deliver sustainable peace to children who are most affected by war.