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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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Children and Armed Conflict

Statement by H.E. Ms Gillian Bird Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

Thank you, Mr President.

Let me begin by commending SRSZ Zerrougui and UNICEF for their tireless efforts on behalf of children affected by armed conflict around the world. That some 115,000 child soldiers have been released since the beginning of the SRSZ mandate is testament to their efforts, and those of their colleagues in the field.

Despite these success stories, the Secretary-General's Report demonstrates that armed conflict continues to take an unacceptably high toll on children, so many of whom continue to be recruited and used in hostilities, killed, injured, raped, abducted and denied education and health care.

This demonstrates that 20 years on, the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is as important as ever, which is why it continues to have Australia's full support.

Against the backdrop of the highly concerning information provided in today's briefings, I would like to focus on three issues: the need to implement action plans; the need to address attacks on health care personnel and facilities; and the need for the stronger protection of child rights in peacekeeping operations.

First, in this, the final year of the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign, there is a critical need for continued efforts to implement the Action Plans in place with national security forces to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The de-listing of nine parties who have fully implemented their Action Plans demonstrates that this is an initiative that is capable of making real change. As the majority of groups listed in the Secretary-General’s report on Children and Armed Conflict are non-State actors, Australia welcomes the efforts taken to ensure that such groups also refrain from grave violations against children and we encourage further efforts towards this end.

Second, Australia is deeply concerned that medical facilities continue to come under frequent attack during conflict, in gross violation of international humanitarian law. This has serious implications for children. It is crucial that Resolution 2286 is fully implemented, including its demand that all parties to armed conflict facilitate the unimpeded passage of medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties.

Third, every effort should be made to ensure that those who have a mandate to protect do no harm to children. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General’s commitment to ban from participating in peacekeeping missions those government forces repeatedly listed in the annexes of the children and armed conflict reports.

Mr President, in conclusion, this Council has repeatedly called for children to be shielded from the impact of conflict. Despite this, too many continue to suffer. We must do more to end grave violations against children, suffered in conflicts not of their making.

Thank you Mr President.