

**United Nations Security Council Open Arria Formula meeting**

**“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict”**

**7 May 2021**

**Mr. President**

At the very outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Estonia and all the co-sponsors for organizing this meeting. I also thank the briefers for sharing their insights on this issue. Our reservations on the Arria format of meetings are well known and on record.

**Mr. President**

Mahatma Gandhi had said and I quote *"If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children."*

Children constitute one third of the humanity, but they make all of its future. It is our common and primary responsibility to protect them as they remain most susceptible to suffering and vulnerable to volatilities.

Over the last two decades the UN Security Council has actively engaged in this pursuit and significant progress has been achieved to protect children in armed conflict situations. However, grave violations against children persist and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the challenges that children in conflict situations are faced with.

**Mr. President**

The pandemic has exacerbated the complex challenges for protection of children in armed conflicts which calls for determined actions by the Member States. In this regard my delegation wishes to submit the following suggestions for Council's consideration:

First, protecting the rights of the child, as mandated under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the primary responsibility of every government. The Security Council must do all that is possible to support efforts of governments in this regard.

Second, school closures due to the pandemic have made children vulnerable to radicalization and indoctrination to violent extremist ideologies by terrorists and other non-state actors. An increase in the recruitment and use of children by these actors is imminent. This poses a severe security threat and calls for a greater attention by the Council to take measures to check this phenomenon.

Third, there is a need for a coordinated approach to child protection agenda and counter terrorism. Terrorist outfits and individuals proscribed by the Council are directly or indirectly responsible for abusing child rights. Member States need to demonstrate the greater political will to hold the perpetrators of terrorism and their sponsors to account, to fulfil Council's child protection obligations.

Fourth, the pandemic has demonstrated the power of technology which enabled us to continue with our efforts to monitor, report and prevent grave violations against children. The digital revolution for example has to be pressed into service for the protection of the child. The international community must seize this momentum to use the full potential of technology to fulfil hitherto unkept promises to the children.

Fifth, we need a more inclusive approach to provide protection to child victims of armed conflicts. Children who grow up in conflict and post-conflict situations often need a fresh start. Support to national governments to strengthen legal and operational tools for child protection is important in this context.

Last but not the least, we need to provide children with hope. Those children caught in the pandemic as victims and nowhere to turn to, need to be reassured about their future and that their hopes and aspirations are not being lost forever in the pandemic. It's the role of the governments and civil society to work in concert to ensure this.

**Mr. President**

In conclusion, I would like to commend the UN agencies, peacekeeping missions and other partners for their efforts in mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and in facilitating humanitarian assistance. Protection of children must continue to receive priority in responding to the pandemic in armed conflicts.

India reaffirms its firm commitment and steadfast support to UN endeavours to protect children in armed conflicts.

**I thank you, Mr. President**