

**Statement by Katherine Zappone, TD  
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs of Ireland**

**at the Security Council Open Debate  
on  
"Children and armed conflict"**

**United Nations  
New York**

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***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

Thank you Mr. President,

I would like to thank today's briefers, and in particular Special Representative Virginia Gamba, for providing valuable testimony for this debate. Ireland also aligns itself with the comments delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. President,

We are here today to discuss a topic that none of us would wish to have to discuss. As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in Ireland, my focus is on helping to build a better, safer, society for children and young people. They are our future.

However, despite the progress we have made in some areas, the Secretary-General's report highlights very worrying trends. This includes a disturbing increase in child victims of conflicts, as well as considerable increases in the recruitment and use of children in certain conflict situations. It also points to an increasing disrespect for international humanitarian law and the impact this has on children.

During a conflict existing social, financial and physical barriers to education are often compounded by indiscriminate or targeted attacks on places of education. The targeting of civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, can have devastating consequences for children's safety, health and education.

Ireland's Humanitarian Assistance Policy recognises that children are often disproportionately affected by conflict. Children are always the most vulnerable to the effects of malnutrition and disease.

But other risks that threaten the wellbeing of children include separation from families or other caregivers; recruitment into armed forces or groups; economic exploitation; physical or sexual abuse; gender-based violence; and psychological distress.

Warlords, criminals and thugs have placed them in the frontline.

Ireland shares deep concern about children separated from their loved ones by war, terror and human smuggling.

A year ago I instructed our Child and Family Agency Tusla to establish a National Project Office to assist children living alone in the former "jungle camp" at the French port of Calais. We are now assisting 30-young people who have fled conflicts in Africa and Asia to restart their lives in Ireland.

I can confirm today that Tusla teams will in the next two weeks meet and assess another 11 children for arrival into Ireland. We have built the capacity to do so and I am determined that we will play a strong role in assisting, supporting and protecting separated children.

The protection of women and girls from gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse in crisis and conflict situations is a priority for Ireland.

As chair of the Commission on the Status of Women this year and next, Ireland will embed the Women, Peace and Security agenda across its work.

Mr President,

Civil society has a crucial role to play to supporting vulnerable and at risk children. Ireland is proud to support the important work done by the ICRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in locating children that have been separated from their families by conflict or displacement, and reuniting them with their relatives. Ireland is also supporting the International Commission on Missing Persons which focuses on conflict, post-conflict and natural disaster situations.

The Secretary General's report highlights a number of issues for children who are victims of the conflict in Colombia. Ireland is pleased to be offering assistance to the implementation of the peace agreements, including projects on gender and justice. As we approach the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Good Friday agreement, we know from our own experience of peace building the importance of these issues.

Mr President,

The Secretary General's report outlines very clearly the dire situation facing children in many conflict situations. Put simply, too often children bear the brunt of adult conflicts.

No one is perfect. We know only too well in Ireland the consequences that can flow from not always protecting, valuing and listening to our children.

That's why we must all step up our efforts to protect children, not least in – and from – conflict. Given its mandate, this Council has a particular responsibility to ensure it is effectively using its tools and mechanisms to end violations against children.

Thank you again Mr President, for organising this very timely and important debate.

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