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Redebeitrag des österreichischen UNO-Botschafters Dr. Pfanzer in der Sicherheitsratsdebatte über das Thema „Kinder und bewaffnete Konflikte“

Der Pressereferent der ständigen Vertretung Österreichs bei den Vereinten Nationen in New York, Botschaftsrat Mag. Richard Kühnel, hat dem Forschungskreis Vereinte Nationen einen Redebeitrag des österreichischen Botschafters Dr. Gerhard Pfanzer zugeschickt, den dieser am 14. Januar 2003 in der Sicherheitsratsdebatte zum Thema „Kinder und bewaffnete Konflikte“ gehalten hat.

Der Beitrag informiert zugleich über die Rolle des Human Security Network, einer interregionalen Ländergruppierung innerhalb der VN, die als einen ihrer Schwerpunkte Workshops und Konferenzen zum Thema Kinder und bewaffnete Konflikte unterstützt bzw. mitorganisiert.

Security Council Debate on “Children and Armed Conflict”

Statement by H.E. Dr. Gerhard Pfanzer

Permanent Representative of Austria

New York, 14 January 2003

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak in Austria's capacity as current Chair of the Human Security Network, an interregional group of countries also comprising Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, and South Africa as an observer.

I Activities of the HSN with regard to children affected by armed conflict

Ever since the creation of the Human Security Network, the issue of children affected by armed conflict has been of critical importance to our agenda. The Network and its individual members were at the origin of several important initiatives, such as the Agenda for War-

Affected Children adopted at the Winnipeg Conference in September 2000, the holding of Workshops on the issue of stopping the use of child soldiers in Jordan, or the programmes of the Centre for Children Traumatized by Armed Conflicts in South Eastern Europe in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to name but a few.

Austria made “children and armed conflict” one of the two priorities issues for her period of chairing the Network. At its next Ministerial Meeting in May this year in Graz, the Human Security Network is expected to adopt a “common support strategy” for children affected by armed conflict identifying a set of operative principles, as well as a training curriculum for child rights monitors and rehabilitation experts. As one of the results, it is envisaged that the Network will contribute to establish a pool of child experts for eventual use in conflict areas.

In November 2002, the Human Security Network supported the holding of an international symposium on children affected by armed conflict here in New York. The event was organized by the Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research in cooperation with the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. This symposium focussed on the implementation of SC Resolution 1379 and came up with a set of concrete recommendations, which have been communicated to the members of this Council.

II Report of the Secretary General

Mr. President, let me now touch upon the politically significant report of the Secretary-General before us. We strongly support the general thrust of this report. I would like to highlight a few aspects contained therein.

It is indeed astonishing how the normative framework for the protection of children in armed conflict has been strengthened during the recent past. In less than a month, we will celebrate the first anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflict. Another event of truly historic dimensions was the recent entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which has an explicit jurisdiction when children under the age of 15 years are conscripted or enlisted into armed forces or groups or used to actively participate in hostilities. And of course, the Security Council has an authority to refer such cases to the Prosecutor of the Court.

While progress with regard to the normative framework for the protection of children in armed conflict is certainly remarkable, I would like to reinforce the call by the Secretary General and his Special Representative for the need to focus now on application. We encourage all states to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol and all other instruments relevant for the protection of children in armed conflict, but also to fully implement the provisions contained therein. There is of course also an essential role for the UN system in ensuring a better implementation of the relevant standards, in the first place through an enhanced operationalization of activities in the field. Austria and the Office of the SRSG are currently working together on a compendium containing all relevant international standards, which will be published shortly and is supposed to improve the understanding and the knowledge of those dealing with children in armed conflict.

Concerning the progress by regional organizations or arrangements, the Secretary General's report acknowledges that the Human Security Network is devoting particular attention to the

issue of children affected by armed conflict and developing concrete initiatives in collaboration with his Special Representative. In fact, we believe that from its interregional perspective, the Network is in a good position to add real value to the international debate and to improve the implementation of standards in our regions through concrete action.

The Human Security Network also fully shares the observations in the report with regard to addressing impunity, the use of land mines and small arms, humanitarian access in zones of conflict, illicit commercial exploitation of natural resources, displaced children, the special needs of girls and the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse. I will refrain from elaborating here on these issues, which are of course of fundamental importance, and refer to the two recent statements made by Austria as Chair of the Human Security Network before this Council. During the debates on “Women, Peace and Security” and the “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict” we presented the Network’s views and made specific recommendations on these subjects.

Let me now come to the much-anticipated list requested by Security Council Resolution 1379 (2001). The Human Security Network welcomes the list annexed to the report as well as the description in the report of further situations of concern, which could not be added to the list due to formal reasons. This list is without doubt a major and politically significant contribution to raising the awareness about the plight of children affected by armed conflict around the world and to eventually ending the recruitment of child soldiers. It also clearly demonstrates that the international community is no longer willing to close its eyes before one of the biggest tragedies we are faced with today.

While the annexed list candidly names 23 parties to armed conflict which recruit or use child soldiers and fulfill the other criteria set out in Resolution 1379, it is, however, obvious that it excludes large numbers of children equally affected by armed conflict. We therefore believe that this list needs to be extended. It should encompass also other situations where children are recruited or used as soldiers or where their protection needs are severely threatened in other ways. As an example, I would like to direct your attention on one situation, which is particularly alarming: the ongoing abductions of numerous boys and girls in Northern Uganda. Based on reports from a variety of sources we have reason to believe that large numbers of children are still being abducted and held by the Lord’s Resistance Army for the use in combat or as sex slaves. The Human Security Network is currently evaluating possible actions in order to shed more light on this situation and to put a halt to this abominable practice. At the same time, we feel that it is necessary also for the Security Council to be able to better assess such situations.

III HSN recommendations to the Security Council

Mr. President, the Human Security Network has some concrete recommendations to present to this Council which in our view would significantly increase the ability of this forum to address the issue of children and armed conflict and will have an impact on the lives of many war-affected children:

1. Continue the consideration of the issue of children and armed conflict on a regular basis and adopt new resolutions adding value to the debate.

2. Create an effective evaluation mechanism for the list of parties to conflict recruiting or using child soldiers and the relevant steps taken by those on it. This could include field visits. The involvement of international agencies and NGO's in this process is crucial.
3. Request the Secretary General to regularly update this list and consider extending it by including also conflict situations not on the Council's agenda, as well as other severe violations of relevant child protection obligations, like abductions or the use of landmines.
4. Enter into a dialogue with governments of countries on the list, ask them to report on the respective situations and urge them to put an immediate end to the recruitment or use of child soldiers, to reintegrate them into society and to stop all other severe violations of child protection obligations. Raise awareness among all parties concerned, including non-state actors, of their obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian, human rights, refugee and criminal law.
5. Ensure that the issue of children affected by armed conflict is also taken up under other agenda items of the Council, in particular when considering resolutions on specific conflict situations or when planning Security Council missions. According to a study by the Watchlist, only 9 out of 75 country-specific Security Council resolutions between August 2000 and October 2002 included references to children and armed conflict.
6. Pay attention to the need for all peace processes, all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes and all justice and reconciliation mechanisms to be child-conscious and for boys and girls to be fully involved in order to make sure that their voices are heard.
7. Increase the child-focused expertise in these processes and promote the training of peacekeeping, civilian police and humanitarian personnel on child protection standards. Each peacekeeping operation should include at least one child protection expert. The establishment of rosters of qualified experts available should be encouraged.
8. Give higher priority to the issues of violence against, trafficking in and exploitation of children, in particular girls, and to the prevention of infectious and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, and request the provision of adequate assistance to the children affected.
9. Make efforts to ensure safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for children in emergencies, with emphasis on particularly vulnerable groups such as displaced and separated children.
10. Improve the exchange of information with non-members, international agencies and with NGOs on the issue of children affected by armed conflict and establish a focal point for this purpose.

Mr. President, let me assure you that the members of the Human Security Network remain fully committed to enhancing the protection of children in armed conflict. This is an urgent matter for our common values and our conscience as humanity.