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STATEMENT

BY

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ON BEHALF OF THE HUMAN SECURITY NETWORK

**AT THE
SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE
ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICTS**

New York, 24 July 2006

Mr President,

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the Human Security Network, namely Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Thailand, Slovenia and South Africa as an observer.

Let me begin by thanking the French Presidency of the Security Council for organizing this important and timely open debate.

The issue of children and armed conflict has been formally placed on the agenda of the SC in 1998. Since then, the progressive engagement of the Council has yielded significant gains for children. These include four resolutions devoted to the issue, an annual debate, an annual report submitted by the Secretary-General, as well as the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism by Security Council Resolution 1612.

Harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children has been one of the priority issues of the Human Security Network since its establishment. The Network particularly welcomes the significant progress achieved by the Working Group on CAAC in the recent months and reiterates its hope that the efforts of the WG will lead to tangible results in the field as soon as possible.

We would like to thank at this occasion the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms Radhika Coomaraswamy, for her presentation and the submission of the first Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We would also like to thank Ms Ann Veneman, UNICEF Executive Director, for UNICEF's engagement in providing special protection for children, affected by armed conflicts.

The Network particularly welcomes the Working Group's decision to publish the Secretary-General's reports addressed to the Working Group under the monitoring and reporting system, enhancing thereby the Working Group's commitment to increased transparency and accountability.

(General Issues)

Children affected by armed conflicts are deprived of education and health care. Children are victims in conflict as both civilian targets and perpetrators of violent acts themselves. They are deliberately killed, maimed, made orphans, abducted or sexually abused. They are also victims of landmines. Children suffer severe psychosocial stress in conflict situations and without proper help and assistance, we risk the loss of young generations that are indispensable for reconciliation and restoration of their war-torn societies. An issue that merits particular attention of the Security Council and of the international

community as a whole is the widespread exploitation of children as soldiers. In many cases, they are systematically recruited by the armed forces and non-state armed groups.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document calls upon States to take effective measures, as appropriate, to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, contrary to international law, by armed forces and groups, and to prohibit and criminalize such practices. Their suffering calls for immediate action in the time of conflict, and after its cessation.

(Security Council Working Group)

The Human Security Network supports the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism as defined in Security Council Resolution 1612 and specific focus on children in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation processes. We also encourage follow-up reporting, particularly on demobilized children. The creation of the Security Council Working Group reflects the international community's commitment to address this issue at the highest level. We fully support the Working Group's efforts to address country specific cases and to respond with concrete recommendations for action as soon as possible. This includes applying targeted and graduated measures as outlined in SCR 1612 and mandating peace keeping missions as appropriate. We acknowledge and appreciate the commitment of the Working Group to examine information on progress made in ending the recruitment and deployment of children in armed conflicts and other violations against them and appeal for a maximum of transparency in their work.

The Security Council's role in addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflicts is an integral part of its peace and security responsibilities. In this regard, the Network further encourages the Council to take up this issue when considering resolutions on specific conflict situations or when planning Security Council field missions. A positive development over the last years is the deployment, on a case-by-case basis, of Child Protection Advisors into certain UN peacekeeping operations. These UN country teams should be working with national and local authorities to develop time-bound Action Plans as mandated in SCR 1612. The Action Plans will allow the Working Group to review progress in specific conflicts and use them as a basis to recommend further action.

Mr President,

(Impunity and international law)

Atrocities committed against children in armed conflict and in situations of protracted violence pose a profound challenge to international law. Massive and gross violations of the rights and dignity of the child continue unabated. Impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity, specifically against children, must end. Effective prosecution of perpetrators must be ensured by taking measures at the national level and by enhancing

international cooperation. The recognition by the International Criminal Court (in the Rome Statute) of the conscripting or enlisting of children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or armed non-state groups, using them to participate actively in hostilities as well as sexual violence, as a method of warfare, as a crime against humanity and a war crime, is a significant development. The Network reiterates the importance of the International Criminal Court in prosecuting such crimes and bringing an end to impunity.

Respect for relevant international and regional norms and standards on human rights and humanitarian law is a prerequisite for the effective protection of children affected by armed conflict. We urge all states which have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the ILO Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and other relevant international legal instruments, and furthermore confirm their commitment by effectively implementing them.

(International Cooperation)

We attach great importance to the active involvement and the contribution of regional and subregional organizations in preventing and suppressing violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict.

We fully support all endeavours of the Office of the Special Representative, the UNICEF, the UNHCR, other parts of the United Nations system, and other relevant international and non governmental organizations in this field. It is also important to strengthen the local structures on the ground and to develop local and national mechanisms for early responses to abuses that feed into the international response. It is indeed of particular importance to pay specific attention to the distinctive needs of girls and boys.

Mr President,

Let me conclude by saying that the Human Security Network fully supports the recent focus of the Security Council on implementation of past resolutions and tangible responses with a view to achieving the goal of ending serious violations and abuses of children's rights in armed conflicts. Furthermore, we encourage ongoing dialogue and cooperation at the local and national levels, with the aim to reduce and eliminate the plight of children in armed conflicts.

Thank you !