STATEMENT
BY

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ON AGENDA ITEM 65: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

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Chairperson,

My delegation appreciates the opportunity to participate in this important debate on the rights of children. We align ourselves with the statements delivered by Fiji on behalf of G77 and China, Ethiopia on behalf of the Africa Group and Malawi on behalf of the Southern African Development Community.

South Africa appreciates the fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is almost at universal ratification. This is a testimony to the high priority placed by states on the protection and development of children and youth.

South Africa has established a national machinery responsible for children’s issues, as well as a dedicated Ministry for Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities, in support of advancing equitable access to development opportunities for vulnerable groups in our society, including children.

The South African government has directed substantial resources to early childhood development and equal and quality education. In this regard, we have achieved the MDG goal of universal primary education before the target date of 2015. In accordance with the importance attached to universal education in our constitution, 20% of the national budget has been allocated to education in 2013, amounting to 6% of GDP.

The government has also launched the Integrated School Health Package, in which onsite health education and health services is provided to schools and learners.

Regarding child mortality, a comprehensive set of initiatives such as the Negotiated Service Delivery Agreement 2010-2024, the Strategic Plan for Maternal, New-born, Child and Women’s Health and the Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal and Child Mortality have been put in place as targeted interventions aimed at reducing child mortality rates. Government has prioritised the health needs and rights of children who are socially vulnerable, living in poverty and residing in rural areas, as well as children affected by HIV and AIDS. Government’s efforts to combat HIV and AIDS is bearing fruit with recent statistics showing a decline in HIV mother-to-child transmission rates to 2.7%.

As part of its anti-poverty interventions, government has implemented a system of social protection for children through the provision of Child Support Grants to families.

Chairperson,

The sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography is part of the broader challenge in combating the illicit trafficking in human beings as a core component of transnational crime. As such, international cooperation remains an important mechanism in combating the activities of international crime syndicates operating in the area of child trafficking.

In order to combat such practices, there is a need for the United Nations system, working in partnership with Member States to develop, adopt and implement sustainable and context-specific strategies for the prevention of the sale of children and for their protection. We urgently need to establish a legal framework in compliance with international standards in order to protect both victims and witnesses to sexual exploitation.
The magnitude and scale of the worldwide abuse against children requires the adoption and implementation of a protective framework that guarantees the protection of the right of children and criminalizes such offences. Strengthening of child protection systems must be a priority for all governments and the United Nations system.

Chairperson,

The plight of children in armed conflict remains an issue of deep concern to my delegation. Armed conflict continues to disproportionately affect children who remain the most vulnerable to attacks, forced recruitment and deprivation of their basic human rights. International law clearly provides that the primary responsibility to protect children rests with the state. Preventing conflict and protecting children constitute important commitments that we should all realise and collectively endeavour to achieve.

There should be no impunity for perpetrators of serious crimes and offences committed against children in conflict and post-conflict settings. We, therefore, welcome the Security Council presidential statement adopted on 17 June 2013, in which the Council expressed strong concern over the high number of repeat offenders that openly disregard Council resolutions and stressed the Council’s commitment to effectively deal with persistent perpetrators, as well as its readiness to adopt targeted measures against them.

The provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children and Armed Conflict and other international instruments, provide us with guidelines on how to address the protection of children in armed conflict.

My delegation commends the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and Children and Armed Conflict for their work highlighting incidents of violence and human rights violations committed against children in all parts of the world.

Chairperson,

South Africa has prioritised the combating of violence against children, resulting in increased legislative action, policy intervention and information campaigns to safeguard children’s freedom from violence.

In conclusion, as a States Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we reaffirm our strong commitment to the effective implementation of our obligations under the Convention and through the enactment of national legislation and programmes that ensure the protection of children and the creation of opportunities for their social and economic wellbeing and advancement.

I thank you.