

**Statement of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy
Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for
Children and Armed Conflict**

**Signing Ceremony – Action Plan on children associated with armed
forces and groups in Chad between the Government of Chad and the
UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism Task Force on Grave
Violations**

N'djamena, 14 June, 10am

Excellences, chers collègues, mesdames et messieurs,

C'est un grand plaisir pour moi d'être présente avec vous aujourd'hui.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you, to witness the signature of the Action Plan to end the recruitment and use of children by the Armee Nationale Tchadienne (ANT) and associated bodies. This Action Plan responds to Security Council resolutions 1539 and 1612, passed to enhance the protection of child rights in the context of conflict. I recall the meeting I had with the Minister of Social Action, National Solidarity and Family in October 2010, when she expressed the intention of the Chadian Government to enter into an action plan. As a result of her words and the dedicated action of the Government and the UN country team, we are here today.

Today's signature ceremony is an important milestone. It is the expression of the Government's steadfast commitment to building a protective environment for children in Chad. It builds on the N'djamena Declaration of last year, in which Chad, alongside five other states, pledged to take concrete

measures to halt the recruitment and use of children by security forces and armed groups. This was an extraordinary initiative and I commend the Government for its leadership on this issue for the Central African region. I take this opportunity to underscore the urgent need to implement the provision of the Declaration by all signatories. In addition, the action plan today also manifests the Chadian Government's commitment to assume full responsibility for the security and protection of its civilian population, in line with Security Council resolution 1923 (2010).

I would like to acknowledge that the implementation of the action plan will take place against the backdrop of an improved security situation in the country. This is the fruit of successful efforts to improve regional relations, as well as the political agreement reached with Chadian political parties in August 2007, which has served as a constructive platform for political dialogue over the past few years. It is my hope that improved security will allow Chad to refocus its attention to the delivery of tangible peace dividends to its people. This is a propitious context for the action plan to be implemented, and completed.

Once completed, the action plan signed today will ensure that children are no longer associated to Chadian security forces. This in itself is positive: it will end a grave violation against children, and will have a direct impact on the lives of former child soldiers who will return home to their families. But it will also have wider repercussions for Chad, both domestically and internationally. Domestically, removing children from its fighting force will contribute to the professionalisation of the armed forces. On the international stage, a complete and durable halt in the recruitment and use of children by

the Chadian national army, including newly integrated elements, will trigger the removal of the Chadian Government from the Secretary-General's 'list of shame', annexed to his annual report on children and armed conflict. This would lead to the removal of the ANT, including newly integrated elements, from the agenda of the Security Council Working Group for children and armed conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The signature of the action plan reflects the political will and commitment of the Chadian Government to move forward in ending a key grave violation against children. While this is an achievement in itself, the bulk of the work lies ahead. Allow me to highlight three key areas, going forward.

Firstly, successful implementation of the action plan will depend on close collaboration between the Government and the United Nations Task Force on children and armed conflict. The action plan calls on the Government to appoint focal points in the Ministries of National Defense, Social Action, and National Solidarity and Family. In addition to this, experience elsewhere has demonstrated that an inter-ministerial committee, composed of all entities involved in the action plan, including the armed forces themselves, helps facilitate the implementation. Building a solid framework to manage the activities in the plan, including coordinating UN verification visits to military barracks, camps and other installations, will be key to success.

Secondly, I cannot over-emphasise the importance of prevention. The action plan calls for a number of measures to be taken in this area. An immediate

step towards prevention would be the adoption of the draft Child Protection Act, which will bring Chad's domestic legislation in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and OPAC and provides criminal sanctions for child recruitment and use. In addition, the action plan provides for the strengthening of the civil registry, in order to ensure that children do not slip through the army's recruitment process. While the reform of the civil registry and the birth registration system is a large and long-term endeavour, as a first and immediate step, age verification of would-be recruits could include other documents, such as the cross-checking of school diplomas and hospital records, and/or medical examinations. Prevention is the only way of avoiding a revolving-door of child recruitment and use.

Thirdly, the Chadian Government's commitment to end recruitment and use must be matched by an international commitment to support the process. Donors and the UN alike have an important role to play in providing support, particularly to the long-term socio-economic reintegration of former child soldiers. Too often, children are separated from armed forces or groups, only to find that they have no school, no livelihood, no family, or no home to go back to. This of course makes them vulnerable to re-mobilisation. Providing socio-economic reintegration support is the Achilles heel of DDR programmes, and yet is also, arguably, the most important component. The international community has, in the past, fallen short of its duty to support this aspect of DDR. I hope that the children that will be separated from the ANT and associated forces, as well as those who have already separated informally, will not be neglected by the international community. It is certainly my hope that the UN system will be able to

develop a robust reintegration programme, in support of the Government, to address the needs of children formerly associated with the security forces.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank UNICEF-Chad, led by Mr. Marzio Babilie, which has been proactive on this issue. I commend the team for their dedication and commitment. I would also like to thank the Resident Coordinator, Mr. Kingsley Amaning, as well as Mr. Stephano Severe of UNHCR and other UN partners for their support and effective action. I would like to reiterate my appreciation to the Chadian Government for having taken concrete action to address the recruitment and use of children, with the support of the UN Task Force. I intend to relay this positive news in person to the Security Council Working Group upon my return to New York. The Working Group will no doubt share my pleasure in the progress that Chad has made in moving this critical agenda forward. They will also be keen to receive updates on the implementation of the plan.

Finally, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, when I visited Chad a few years ago, I was very concerned. Increasing tension on your eastern border had led to a large number of violations against children. MINURCAT dissuaded me from travelling east due to the security risks. Things look very different today. It is a time of renewed hope. The number of violations is gradually decreasing and we look forward to imaginative programmes that will reintegrate children into their communities and provide for a better future. I will be travelling east on this visit and I will meet with Chadian children, where I hope to see for myself the benefits of this newfound peace and security. My office and my staff remain ready to assist you in your

endeavour to protect your children and bring hope back to your country.

Thank you.