STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR HARDEEP SINGH PURI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE AT THE OPEN DEBATE OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT ON JULY 12, 2011

Thank you, Mr President.

Let me begin by welcoming you, Mr President, to New York. I thank you for chairing our open debate today. I also wish to welcome the honourable ministers from South Africa, Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Portugal to the Security Council. I also would like to note with appreciation the presence of the Secretary General. This underlines the importance we all attach to the issue under consideration. I would also like to express our appreciation for Germany’s able stewardship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and for organizing this debate.

Mr President,

2. Rabindranath Tagore, the national poet of India, said that “Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man.” Children constitute a third of humanity – the most important third. They are also the weakest and, therefore, the most susceptible to suffering. If we are to be judged by how we treat the weakest amongst us, then we have a lot to account for.

3. Children continue to suffer appallingly from violence, from hunger, and from illness. What is perhaps more tragic is the manner in which millions of children are condemned to live life in the margins, bereft of opportunity, and sometimes of hope. They do so when other more fortunate children embark upon lives of unprecedented prosperity and promise.

4. Mr President, President Nelson Mandela has said that “We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear.” This is in some ways, the primary responsibility of every government, the most important element of the social contract between governments and citizens. The work of the United Nations on Children in general and on Children and Armed Conflict in particular, is therefore amongst its most important activities.

5. India believes that the international community has the responsibility, and indeed the obligation, to do its utmost to provide succor to children affected by armed conflict. We have engaged constructively in the ongoing efforts to make the efforts of the United Nations more relevant and effective in this area. We strongly support the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We have participated actively in its deliberations and will continue to contribute to the strengthening of a regime which protects children in situations of armed conflict.
6. The work being done by the international community in this area is, in some ways, at the cutting edge of international politics and international law. We need to move forward with deliberation after taking into account the concerns and experiences of member states. India has a number of concerns about the manner in which Security Council resolutions in this area are being interpreted. Several delegations that have spoken before me have raised the same concerns.

7. My delegation believes that the provisions of the Charter of United Nations must be followed consistently and scrupulously. Member States should not outsource the exercise of their basic prerogatives and responsibilities to international civil servants. The actions of the international community that have legal and judicial characteristics must be in accordance with the doctrine of natural justice and separation of powers. The principle of *audi alteram partem* or “hear both sides” must be adhered to. “Mandate creep” must be checked and countered.

8. Mr President, India deplores grave violations and crimes against children during war. We have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and are committed to the norms and practices that are associated with this international regime.

9. The Government of India accords the highest priority to ensuring that the rights of children in India are protected. 19% of the worlds’ children are Indian and we have created a legal and institutional framework to protect and promote their rights and their well being. A National Charter for Children has been adopted. Free and compulsory education upto the age of 14 years has been declared a fundamental right. A National Commission for Protection of Children has also been set up. A National Plan of Action for Children has also been adopted. The Government of India is committed to creating, through these and other initiatives, a protective environment for children.

10. In this connection, I would also like to point out that civil society in India is an integral part of this framework. We consider civil society to be a valued partner in our national and international efforts on children’s issues.

11. Mr President, India has been at the forefront of converting this Council’s word into deed through its peacekeeping mandates. More than 100,000 Indian troops and policemen have participated in peacekeeping operations over the past five decades. Based on our experience on the ground, we would like to emphasize that the central challenge in the implementation of this Council’s mandates is the question of resources.

12. I am sure that SRSG Coomaraswamy, whose commitment to the job we greatly admire, will agree with me when I say that more Child Protection Advisors are required with more resources in peacekeeping missions. We would encourage the SRSG to work with national authorities in developing capacities to deal with children in armed conflict. We believe that support for efforts by national authorities to end impunity and ensure accountability should be a key focus area.

13. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism requires the involvement of Member States and close supervision by them in order to ensure veracity and credibility. We
expect that the process of data collection and analysis and that of listing and de-listing will be carried out in a transparent and judicious manner under the close supervision of Member States.

14. Mr President, vast numbers of children are affected and traumatized by armed conflict. However, we cannot lose sight of the economic and social marginalization of the poorest nations that is driving hundreds of millions more into the kind of childhood that could well make them part of tomorrow's problems rather than tomorrow's solutions. We need to address this broader picture, the destitution and desperation that claim even more lives than armed conflict, and that often pave the way for a fresh cycle of violence. This, unfortunately, does not attract the attention of the international media, nor can it be an issue on the mandate of the Security Council, but in our discussions here, we need to make sure that our focus is not distorted and that we do not lose sight of the larger emergency which faces us and which constitutes a global challenge.

15. In concluding, Mr President, I would like to quote an English author who said that “Children begin by loving their parents; after a time, they judge them; rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.” We must not be found lacking in our efforts if we have any chance of forgiveness from the children who are our future.

Thank you.

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