



**Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines  
to the United Nations**

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**Statement**

by

**H.E. Ms. Keisal Peters**

Minister of State in the Ministry Foreign Affairs, Trade and Commerce

**High-Level Open Debate on Children in Armed Conflict**

Security Council

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Thank you Madame President,

Let me begin by thanking our distinguished briefers, the Secretary General H.E Mr. Antonio Guterres, Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Advocate for Children Affected by War, Mr. Forest Whitaker, and Education Specialist at Plan International Nigeria, Mr. Laban Onisimus, for presenting, in very clear terms, the urgency with which we must act in service of our children.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines takes this opportunity, in the 25<sup>th</sup> year since the emergence of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate, to acknowledge the remarkable progress in shifting consciousness and in creating national mechanisms to protect and promote the wellbeing of children in fragile and conflict affected countries and regions. Against this backdrop, we congratulate the Office of the Special Representative of Children in Armed Conflict upon receiving **the Sapienza Human Rights Award 2020**; another signal and most deserving achievement.

Madame President,

In spite of progress made, the number and severity of verified grave violations against children, in 2020, remains worryingly unchanged. This is especially concerning, given the challenges encountered by the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms (MRMs), as a result of COVID-19 containment measures globally. As we have heard this morning, children, particularly refugee and displaced children, suffer the worst effects of the ever changing and complex nature of armed conflict. The report of the Office of the SRSG and UNICEF, on the *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, paints a grim picture of how the situation for children is further compounded by the current health and related economic crises. There is urgent need for adherence to the call for a global ceasefire, and to ensure that the pandemic response and recovery programmes are both child-centred and gender-responsive.

Emerging child protection actions, mechanisms, and related adaptation measures must embed critical gender analysis. This will ensure appropriately tailored responses for girls and boys who are differently affected by violence in armed conflict. Although significantly underreported, the overwhelming majority of sexual violence is perpetrated against girls; a situation made worse by the reduced capacity of national, regional and international actors to engage in prevention, and protection work, and to provide psychosocial support for children. Girls are also disproportionately affected by school closures and overall attacks against education. They are far less likely to return to schools

and suffer increased risk of experiencing sexual violence in these contexts. Boys are however far more likely to be victims of the most prevalent verified violations. They are killed and maimed, and recruited and used at much higher rates when compared to girls. In addition, boys are more likely to be detained in state institutions and to be held by armed groups.

We welcome necessary developments to improve accountability and implement increased child protection measures. These developments include:

1. The appointment of a Minister Counsellor to the President on child protection and the Promulgation of the Child protection code criminalising child recruitment in the Central African Republic;
2. The November 2020 launch of the child protection policy by the Ministry of the Interior in Afghanistan, where there exists an alarmingly high number of children killed and maimed; and
3. Advances on the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, through a draft law on the protection of education against attacks in Mali.

Madame President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines underscores the importance of actions which emphasise rehabilitation, reintegration and the consistent application of handover protocols in line with juvenile justice standards established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict; recognising, of course, that children are, first and foremost, victims of armed conflict. We are gravely concerned about the erosion of progress on child protection, as what we are now witnessing is a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, linked to increasingly complex and challenging security contexts, globally.

Certainly, a combination of political will and national ownership; cooperation between the UN and regional bodies; and consistent and predictable funding is required to ensure compliance, by states, with their obligations to protect children, as enshrined in the relevant international accountability mechanisms. These include adherence to International Humanitarian, Human Rights and Refugee Law, CRC juvenile justice standards, and all other relevant international accountability mechanisms.

In closing Madame President, I wish to recall analysis drawn from the 2017 Policy on Child Protection in Peacekeeping Operations. We must ensure that relevant child protection provisions are consistently included in the mandates of all UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and special political missions (SPMs).

Excellencies, we must remind ourselves that children bear no responsibility for violent conflict. Yet, they remain most adversely affected. Let us seize this moment of collective and renewed commitment to embark on truly transformative actions for the sake of all the world's children.

I thank you.