Amb. Roet UNSC Speech on Children & Armed Conflict

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Permanent Mission of Israel to the UN

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Thank you

Mr. President,

The girls and boys of today represent the hope for a better tomorrow. When a child is a victim of war, his world- his family, his community have lost their most precious possession- their hope for a brighter future.

The loss of any child is an incomparable tragedy. The deliberate infliction of harm on children is an inhuman crime. Protecting these children is our highest obligation.

According to the Jewish tradition, whoever saves one life it is as if he has saved the entire world. 70 years after the establishment of this institution, there are far too many lives we fail to save. The painful fact is that children all over the world are suffering from unprecedented cruelty and inhumanity.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has already abducted 1000 children, many of whom were placed on the frontlines to act as human shields.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, civilians, including children, are being beheaded, mutilated, and raped.

In Yemen, Saudi Arabia’s massive and indiscriminate airstrikes have hit hospitals and schools, and killed hundreds of civilians, including many children. The Houthis are recruiting boys as young as 14 to use as child soldiers, arming them with Kalashnikovs, and sending them to the front lines.

In Iraq, ISIS is forcing young girls to call their parents to detail being gang-raped by dozens of men.

In Syria, ISIS forces abducted and tortured Kurdish children, and forced them to watch footage of ISIS beheadings and attacks.

When we look at the world today through the eyes of children, we see a terrifying picture. Too many dreams are being shattered, too many hopes are being extinguished, and too many are robbed of their childhood by unimaginable brutality.

It must stop. This Council must act to end these atrocities against children. Today’s resolution, that Israel co-sponsored, is a positive step forward.

Mr. President,

Last week, the Secretary General published his annual report on children and armed conflict. With all the regimes, with all the organizations that intentionally and strategically target children all around the world, it is simply absurd that this report disproportionately focuses on Israel.

The report has 17 paragraphs on Syria, 9 on Yemen, 8 on Iraq, 6 on Libya and no less than 32 paragraphs on Israel. Yes, you heard right, twice as much space was dedicated to Israel as to Syria, where approximately a quarter of a million people have been killed, including, according to the New York Times, over 3500 children just this year, 3500, while the report misleads by inexplicably putting the number at 368.

The reason for this skewed presentation is evident. Instead of being balanced, neutral, and focused on facts, the report’s discussion of Israel is politicized, stained with interests, and distorts reality.

And what about Hamas?

A terror organization which, as we speak, runs military summer camps for elementary school children.

Surely a report about the use of children in warfare would discuss them in detail.

Well, read through the report and try to count how many times the name Hamas even appears - Finding Hamas in this report is harder than finding a needle in a haystack.

In reality, Hamas and other terrorist organizations launched approximately 4,000 rockets and mortars during last summer’s conflict. These missiles were deliberately directed at Israel’s civilian population. In the words of Hamas Spokesman Fawzi Barhoum, “our rockets are aimed at the Hebrews, the murderers, the Israelis, the criminals…our missiles accurately target the homes of the Israelis and the Zionists.”

Over 15,000 rockets and mortars have been fired into Israel from Gaza since 2001. There is a generation of children in Israel who live under a daily threat of Hamas rockets and mortars.

Not only did Hamas deliberately target Israeli civilians and children, it also demonstrates complete disregard for the lives of Palestinian children.

While Israel tried to save Palestinian lives by warning them to leave combat areas, Hamas threatened their lives if they did

While Israel takes every precaution to avoid harm to non-combatants, Hamas voids international law by launching rockets from schools, hospitals, mosques, and other places children would usually be safe.

The military use of schools by Hamas is dreadful. As today’s resolution states, “such use is in contravention of applicable international law”.

 Mr. President,

Omitted from the report was one clear fact-This was not a war that Israel wanted. Israel deeply regrets the harm caused to the Palestinian civilian population during Operation Protective Edge.

This operation was in response to over 450 rockets and mortars launched from the Gaza Strip, including more than 60 in just one day, while Israel did not react.

Israel took all measures to de-escalate the conflict by accepting ceasefire after ceasefire, while Hamas rejected all attempts. In a war forced on Israel by Hamas, Israel took unprecedented precautions to avoid the loss of life of innocents civilians, going beyond what is required by international law and what is done by any other army in the world.

The IDF used leaflets, phone calls and text messages to warn the civilian population to evacuate rocket launch sites. It aborted or suspended operations against terror targets when it became apparent that civilians would be harmed.

And even while attacked by the ruling authority in Gaza, Israel kept the flow of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza.

Mr. President,

I ask myself,

Why are all of these clear and crucial facts absent from the report of the Special Representative?

Is it possible that they simply failed to notice?

Unfortunately, the failure of this report goes far deeper than mere oversight.

The drafting of the report was marked at every level by widespread, systematic and institutionalized biased conduct against Israel.

From the outset, the regional Working Group conveniently forgot to inform Israel of the writing of the report, nor did they deem it necessary to seek input from the Israeli authorities.

Time after time Israel tried to provide official evidence and facts to the Working Group, but we were flatly refused.

Yet, NGOs with a publicly available record of notorious anti-Israel activity were welcomed with open arms as an integral part of the working group.

Furthermore, the Special Representative’s office left no real opportunity for Israel’s extensive reservations to even be considered, thus making it evident that the SRSG’s office’s engagement with Israel was a mere formality for the sake of checking the box. Such practices contradict relevant Security Council resolutions and guidelines to involve Governments as an integral part throughout the process.

We are extremely troubled by the fact that internal sensitive information, which was supposed to be only known to the SRSG’s office and to UN Officials, was leaked to the press in an intentional attempt to pressure and dictate the final outcome to include Israel in the report’s annex. Have you ever heard anywhere a consideration of the SRSG in regards to the listing or not listing of countries, except this time?

Such unauthorized and irresponsible leaks should not be tolerated. They serve only to undermine the credibility of the report, the SRSG’s office and the entire UN system. This conduct should be investigated.

Mr. President,

No organization is perfect, and no procedure is immune to criticism. Raising concerns with regard to practices and procedures of the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict should not be automatically perceived as mere “national interest” and are essential for the protection of children.

I must express deep concern about the report’s statement that the question of intent when determining responsibility will be not be a crucial consideration. The Laws of Armed Conflict provide one of the critical barriers preventing war from descending into unrestrained barbarism. Ignoring intention would be contrary to existing international law and plays into the hands of those who intentionally target and use civilians in combat, and leave children more vulnerable.

Without attention to intention, those who are responsible for harming children will remain free to repeat their crimes, and we will fail in our sacred obligation to the children of the world.

Mr. President,

The Bible tells us that all children are a gift of God. We have an obligation to do all we can to protect the lives of the most vulnerable among us, no matter who they are or where they are from.

Israel’s concern for the life and well-being of children knows no color, no ethnicity, no nationality nor faith, and it knows no borders.

Israel’s commitment to protection of children is absolute. We will remain committed to safeguard the lives of all children in accordance with our democratic values, our moral conscience, and our belief in sanctity of human life.

Thank you.