
Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at a UNGA High-Level Event entitled “Funding the Future: Challenges and Responses to the Reintegration of Child Soldiers”, 24 September 2018

Your Majesty, Queen of the Belgians,

United Nations Secretary General, Mr Gutierrez

Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba

Distinguished guests,

Dear friends.

I would like to begin my remarks by commending the work of my dear friend Virginia Gamba.

Virginia, thank you for your tireless commitment to reach out to those children and young people, across the world, who through their short life experience have suffered and are suffering a lot.

Your inspiring leadership is more important now, than ever, as the world, and our children face new and more complex challenges, due to violent conflict and increasing social tensions.

As stated by UNICEF, in June 2018, “around 30 million children have been displaced by conflict, need.....protection now, and sustainable solutions over the long term.”

Such a statement should be more than enough to galvanise the international community into immediate and effective action.

30 million children, isolated and stranded from necessary support, is unacceptable.

We all know that, children on-the-move are extremely vulnerable and need adapted, context-specific protection, in countries of origin, transit, and of destination.

We all know that while in transit, and especially in camps, children should have access to services, such as education, health, and psycho-social assistance, to help them reclaim their childhood.

It is important not to avoid leaving children without access to education, for extended periods of time, as this will make it more difficult to reintegrate them in their original, or new community.

States, and the International Community, have an obligation to protect and reintegrate these children, by providing the necessary services.

This is why there is such a desperate need for investment in child protection and reintegration.

I believe that, the successful protection and reintegration of children, must be part of a holistic approach, which aims to implement long-lasting peace, and the socio-economic regeneration of every society, that has experienced, have been, or is being affected by, violent conflict.

Another alarming statistic, according to the latest data from UNICEF, is that, nearly one child in four, is living in countries presently affected by conflict or disaster.

Definite, it is urgent to provide effective solutions. These children represent the present, and even more so, the future of the countries and regions they have had to flee from.

Without adequate response from the international community, we will never reach our objective, of preventing violations against children.

We must all redouble our efforts, to ensure effective and adequate protection mechanisms, including reintegration services, for all displaced children.

States, and the international community, cannot continue to be complacent, and fail to provide for effective child protection and reintegration.

States have the clear responsibility, enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to promote the rights, and protect the fundamental dignity of each and every child.

Never had there been a convention, as the CRC, that has been so widely approved and committed to.

Therefore, I would like to commend, Virginia, the Special Representative of the Secretary General, for proposing the placement of Child Protection Advisors in areas of conflict.

These Child Protection Advisors will be ideal interlocutors, between authorities and armed groups. They will also monitor and document the abuse suffered by children, and advocate for their protection.

I augur that today's event, and the launch of a Roadmap towards implementing a Reintegration Fund for Children, alongside a Coalition for Reintegration, will provide the much-needed impetus, to put a spotlight on children in violent conflict.

The educational, psychological, healthcare, and emotional needs of the child, must be addressed through an approach, that respects the participation and the integrity of the child, by creating safe spaces, adapted to the child's needs. This is how we can hope that each and every child can find the necessary healing.

In this process, special attention must also be given to, unaccompanied migrant and asylum-seeking children. In this context, it is essential to also promote and provide for family reunifications.

States, and the International Community should regard this process, as an investment, in the future of our human family.

I am pleased to note that this important investment, is also highlighted, in the United Nations Youth Strategy, which identifies children as positive agents of change.

Children who have experienced armed conflict have a unique contribution to make, to ensure positive change within our world, and help to develop a culture of sustainable peace.

I also believe that children are the primary stakeholders to achieve the mandate of Agenda 2030, and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

Therefore, I call, on the United Nations' entities, Member States, private sector collaborators, and civil society activists, to rise to this challenge, to prioritise the protection, and the reintegration of children, who have experienced, and are experiencing armed conflict, and to promote the dignity, and wellbeing of each and every child.

Each and every child has the right to a dignified childhood.

Thank you for your attention.