Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you today. Thank you to permanent mission of France for organizing this event.

My name is Mahabir Chaudhari, I am from the Tuchipo Dang district in Western Nepal. I am here to speak about my country, because it is one example of the way children are being targeted and abused during armed conflict.

I am member of the Tharu community- the Tharu are the indigenous people of Nepal. For many years, many Tharu people were held as bonded laborers, Kamaiya, and often poor and illiterate. Before that they had lived freely on their own land. In 1991 I was a founding member of BASE (Backward Society Education), a community based organization working for disadvantaged people 7 districts in Southwest Nepal. Our work has focused on empowerment of the Tharu people, and working to end bonded labor.

Since 1996 when the Maoist insurgency began in Nepal our work to protect Tharu people and children has been affected in many ways. At first, the Maoists tried to collaborate with BASE because of our strong grass roots support in the communities. When we refused, the Maoists targeted us and tried to stop our programs and shut down our offices. The government thought we were supporting the Maoists and began to closely watch our programs.

In the areas where BASE is working, young people are also caught in the middle. Young people between 15 and 18, as well as those in their early twenties, have left many of the areas where BASE is working because they are being targeted by both parties to conflict. Many of them have fled to India as well as to district headquarters inside Nepal, where they work in very poor conditions and getting very little wages. They are missing out on their education and being separated from their families.

Maoists are pressuring young people to join their ranks. In certain parts of western Nepal Maoists have made an announcement that one person from every family must join them ranks. In many cases young people were made to join.

Young people are beaten or attacked by security forces when they are accused of being Maoists. In certain cases the security forces will arrest or detain young people with no explanation or charge.

One time when I was distributing educational materials in a village, the Maoists came -they told me they were advocating for free education. They looted all of our supplies.

In villages there is very little medicine and all health clinics have been closed.
or set on fire. For most children in villages there are no options if they become sick, they often have to wait for our traveling medical clinic, which only comes every two weeks. There is no protection for children and families in the lowlands, no police, no government offices. Almost all schools in these villages are already closed. Even in cases where community members go to the district headquarter to repost abuses to the security forces or police they may be killed or targeted by the Maoists when they return. People in the villages do not want to repost, because they are so afraid.

Right now the future is dark—children are not being educated, they are being targeted and fleeing from their villages.

It is a great opportunity for me to be speaking to you today. It’s bodies like the Security Council that can help with the problems I just described. Here are some of my thoughts about what actions you could take:

First, Security Council should visit Nepal to understand the situation firsthand. Its important not just to visit cities, but to see what is going on outside and meet villagers whose lives are affected every day.

Second, security Council should make sure that those who abuse children are held accountable for their actions. As I said, children are being recruited and missing their education and fleeing their homes. As the Security Council has said, this is illegal.

Third, someone needs to be keeping track of what is going on in villages. People are to afraid to talk to either the government or the Maoists. The UN could help to provide people with a place where they could report violations and receive support.

Nepal is like so many other countries suffering from armed conflict, Nepal needs support from the international community to bring peace to our country the way the Security Council has provided support for countries like Congo and Liberia—we need support to bring the warring parties together to seek peace and protect the children of Nepal.

Thank you.