

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to warmly thank France for organizing this very important ministerial debate on the protection of civilian populations during peacekeeping operations. I also wish to welcome your presence here with us today, Mr. Minister, and that of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic. I also thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for his statement.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The atrocities that civilians endure in the many conflicts raging around the world today, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, represent an unprecedented challenge to the basic pillars of international law, international humanitarian law and the enforcement of the principle of protecting civilians in times of conflict. Such atrocities particularly impact women and children, the groups most vulnerable to such violations. Despite the great advancements on the conceptual level in the protection of civilians since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which established the protection of civilians as a key priority for the Security Council and made it one of the major pillars of the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations, the continued plight of civilians in many armed conflicts has clearly exemplified the degree of failure of our efforts to provide protection on the ground. The most appropriate way for peacekeeping operations to undertake a role in protecting civilians is still unclear. There is no agreement yet among Member States on the effectiveness of the use of force by United Nations missions to protect civilians. In that context, Egypt pays tribute to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was granted an active mandate in the field of cooperation, in particular with the Force Intervention Brigade, which was an offensive component. Despite its relative success, that mandate did not succeed in providing enough protection to civilians in eastern Congo, where they are still the victims of atrocities at the hands of armed groups. Turning to South Sudan, the Organization provided direct protection to civilians in the United Nations camps. However, despite those efforts, that style of direct protection — notwithstanding its moral imperative — is still extremely costly and not sustainable. It also does not expand its protection to the hundreds of thousands of civilians at risk beyond the gates of United Nations camps. In addition, they face overcrowding in such camps, particularly the ones that impose security inside those walls.

We should first stress that States and Governments shoulder the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. The objective of peacekeeping operations is to promote the capabilities of States to meet their obligations, while respecting the principles of

sovereignty, national ownership and the cultural specificity of the host country. In that context, we can look at the role of peacekeeping operations in providing protection to civilians in terms of three main pillars.

First, as a political tool that enables them to play a central role in providing a conducive environment to end conflicts and reach a peaceful settlement and in providing support to the parties to the conflict in the implementation of the peace agreements reached among them. Secondly, those missions play a role in providing physical and material protection to civilians through the military and police forces in cases where the State is unable to provide protection and the peacekeepers establish refugee camps or counter the attacks of armed groups.

Thirdly, the missions can provide a safe environment through the implementation of a number of measures, including promoting and developing relevant national institutions in the country concerned, such as the justice and security sectors.

Therefore, efforts to develop the capabilities of peacekeeping operations must stress the following:

First, operations should standardize the concepts regarding the protection of civilians and set policies that accurately define the duties demanded of the peacekeeping operations, including clarifying the rules of engagement that the forces must adhere to while undertaking their duties.

Secondly, troop-contributing countries should be involved in establishing the mandates of the peacekeeping operations and a planning process aimed at ensuring the presence of a common vision and common objective with regard to the tasks that the operations should carry out.

Thirdly, troop-contributing countries must include a component on the protection of civilians in their pre deployment training so that they can inform their troops of the scope of their duties.

Fourthly, the Secretariat should be encouraged to initiate better communication on the social level, have an early-warning system, report any attack against civilians and ensure a prompt response from the peacekeeping operations.

Fifthly, peacekeeping missions should be provided with the necessary expertise and components so as to enable them to provide protection to civilians, and the Secretariat must regularly provide a report on all United Nations missions on the extent to which they have implemented their mandate.

Indeed, there have been great advancements in the capability of peacekeeping operations to provide protection to civilians. However, the increasing number of conflicts and gross violations, including the resort to violence, forced displacements and cutting access to humanitarian aid, are factors that we need to take into account in order to promote a better role for the United Nations in the framework of peacekeeping operations, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians. Here I would like to refer to the fact that ending conflicts is the only sure way to sustainably protect civilians. The effective protection of civilians in armed conflict should not be limited to physical or material protection. It should focus, first and foremost, on providing political solutions aimed at ending conflicts and preventing their resurgence. It should also address the root causes of such conflicts so as to prevent their recurrence.

That might be the central message emanating from the reports of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/682) and of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (S/2015/490), in addition to the need to accord greater attention in the future to the new challenges and difficulties that threaten civilians, which, apart from armed conflicts, consist mainly of the spread of international terrorism as a nefarious phenomenon. Any effort to promote only material or physical protection will end up being only a marginal effort that tackles the symptoms and not the source of the problem. It will not ensure a genuine and sustainable protection of civilians. Peacekeeping operations are merely a tool to protect civilians and should therefore be used in the framework of a more comprehensive strategy aimed at settling conflicts and preventing their resurgence.