

**Mr. Innadze** (Georgia): Georgia aligns itself with the statement just made by the observer of the European Union delegation. In my national capacity, I would like to add the following.

First, let me express my gratitude to the French presidency, in particular to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development, for convening this debate and presiding over it at the beginning. I also thank the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their valuable contributions. I would like to extend our special thanks to the President of the Central African Republic for his insightful comments and to congratulate him and the people of the Central African Republic on their remarkable progress towards achieving sustaining peace and functioning State institutions.

Unfortunately, the most flagrant violations of human rights occur in the circumstances surrounding armed conflict, wherein innocent civilian populations, especially women and children, constitute the overwhelming majority of victims. Today the urgency of the situation is further exacerbated by unabated international terrorism and violent extremism, tragic developments in the Middle East and unresolved conflicts in many other regions throughout the globe, including my own. We believe in the centrality of the protection of civilians in all United Nations peacekeeping mandates. The safety of the population must be viewed as a critical component for stability, security and sustainable peace.

Throughout the decades, the Security Council has been addressing the issue of the protection of civilians through its statements, resolutions and various peacekeeping operations. As peacekeeping missions have grown in numbers, size and scope, the United Nations has made increasingly concerted efforts to put civilian protection at the heart of those operations. Nevertheless, with rapidly changing circumstances throughout the world, renewed efforts are urgently needed for peacekeeping to become more efficient in terms of its humanitarian and human rights dimensions, which means protecting civilians first.

While the Security Council has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, including through the establishment of peacekeeping operations, in recent years we have experienced several unfortunate cases when the Council has failed to exercise its mandate to ensure the effective and efficient protection of the civilian population. In that regard, we once again welcome and fully support the French proposal on the suspension of the veto power in cases of mass atrocities. In 2014 Georgia also joined the supporters of the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, initiated by Liechtenstein.

Georgia experienced the unfortunate termination of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, which played a crucial role in maintaining peace and stability in Abkhazia, Georgia by the single-handed veto of a Security Council member in the spring of 2009. That irresponsible action created a dangerous precedent in United Nations peacekeeping. Since then, no adequate replacement for the dismantled international presence has been created in Georgia. While the European Union Monitoring Mission continues its duties, the tireless efforts to seek an independent, neutral and effective international presence on the ground for the purpose of peacekeeping has proved to be unsuccessful so far.

Against that background, the civilian population residing in the occupied Georgian territories are deprived of minimal safeguards for their safety and are stripped of their fundamental rights and freedom. The recent brutal murder of Giga Otkhozoria, a Georgian internally displaced person from the occupied Abkhazia region, who was shot dead while crossing the occupation line, is a sobering reminder of the seriousness of the situation. It also underlines the necessity of establishing international security and human rights monitoring mechanisms on the ground. A permanent fear for one's life, the installation of barbed-wire fences in the middle of yards and farmland, illegal detentions, restrictions on the freedom of movement and the prohibition of education in one's native language — all of those illegal, illegitimate and arbitrary actions constitute the dire reality of life in the occupied Georgian territories.

Based on our own experience, we believe that peacekeeping operations should not be staffed predominantly by representatives of any one single State, and never by the military of a State that is a party to the conflict, or is heavily involved in the particular conflict. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Peacekeeping Force, which served as the security component for the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia on the ground, clearly lacked the trust and confidence of Georgians in the area, as it was staffed exclusively by Russian military personnel. On many occasions, they triggered, or were directly involved in, grave violations of the peace arrangements, including severe human rights abuses against the local Georgian population and other incidents. Eventually, the CIS Peacekeeping Force was turned into an occupation force by the Russian Federation in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Georgia is fully committed to a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel. On 5 June, an inter-agency investigative team, set up at the initiative of the Defence Minister of Georgia, left for the Central African Republic to carry out investigative activities on the ground. Also, in response to a Secretariat request, the Government of Georgia presented the candidature of an officer, on a gratis basis, to serve with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, whose focus would be on the legal issues surrounding the sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by international peacekeeping forces.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Georgia's full support for efforts to make peacekeeping more effective and more human-centred, with its primary focus on the responsibility to protect the civilian population.