

**Ms. Ibrahim** (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for the concept note (S/2016/503, annex) provided to guide our discussion. We also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. We acknowledge the important role of France, among others, on this issue, including our region, with the Multinational Joint Task Force. We appreciate the perspectives brought to the debate by His Excellency the President of the Central African Republic and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer.

United Nations peace operations are a vital part of the global security architecture. They have been a source of hope for victims of conflict. Vulnerable people living in conflict zones across the world count on the United Nations to protect them. With the growing number of people affected by conflict, that has become a challenge for the United Nations. To its credit, the Organization has taken bold steps to meet the challenge.

Nigeria is pleased to note the progress made, particularly at the normative level, since the Council took the historic step in 1999 to recognize the protection of civilians as central to the mandate of peacekeeping missions. Ten of the 16 current United Nations peacekeeping missions, involving more than 97 per cent of all United Nations peacekeepers, have the protection of civilians in their mandates. Resolution 1894 (2009), which calls for allocation of resources for the protection of civilians, is emblematic of the effort to translate normative commitments into concrete measures that enhance the protection of civilians in theatres of conflict.

The international community expects the United Nations to perform flawlessly when offering protection to civilians in conflict areas. However, the challenges faced by peacekeeping missions are often overlooked or not adequately appreciated. Indeed, challenges remain in the implementation of protection mandates in conflict areas. We support the continued engagement of the Security Council on the issue, and we see merit in the pragmatic and effective efforts to achieve constructive results to that end.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a task that involves multiple issues and requires the collective efforts of various stakeholders. At the strategic level, close collaboration among the Security Council, the United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations, troop- and police-contributing countries and individual United Nations peacekeeping missions is vital for the success of a protection-of-civilians mandate. Similarly, at the tactical level, close coordination among the various components of a peace mission is crucial to achieving success in the protection of civilians in conflict areas. It should be underscored that a clear and common understanding of protection mandates is fundamental to the effectiveness of strategic coordination among mission components.

While emphasizing the imperative for peacekeepers to act when civilians are under threat, we urge troop- and police-contributing countries to ensure that their personnel have the requisite predeployment training in protection issues. It is also important that peacekeepers not be restricted by additional caveats beyond those explicitly accepted by the Secretariat before deployment.

Nigeria strongly supports community engagement in promoting the protection of civilians. Community- alert networks and community-liaison assistants are vital to understanding perceptions of threat at the community level, including how communities seek to reduce risks and how peace operations can address them. We would like to see the international community recognize those imperatives.

Nigeria is firmly committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and recognizes the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians within their national jurisdictions. That conviction underlies our Government's resolve to take all measures necessary to protect civilians in the battle against the terrorist group Boko Haram and its likes. Indeed, the Government of Nigeria has no higher priority than to rescue all of the persons held hostage by that group.

Since the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force, considerable success has been recorded in the battle against Boko Haram. Over a thousand kidnapped women and children have been rescued, and all territories once controlled by the group have been recovered. Despite the enormous efforts made by the Nigerian Government and the member States of the Lake Chad Basin Commission as well as by the Republic of Benin, we believe that more still needs to be done. We recognize the imperative for internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups to be provided with adequate protection, as anything short of that could expose them to further abuse. We therefore call on the international community to continue to support the efforts of the Multinational Joint Task Force to protect civilians in the course of their intricate assignment.

In conclusion, Nigeria salutes the courage of peacekeepers, who work tirelessly, usually under very challenging circumstances, to keep civilians safe. We pay tribute to the men and women who have lost their lives while serving in United Nations peacekeeping missions, and we offer our deep condolences to their families, their friends and their Governments.