

**Mr. Pinheiro da Silva** (Portugal) (*spoke in French*): I would like, first of all, to express our gratitude to France for organizing this very important debate on the protection of civilians. I also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the President of the Central African Republic for their briefings.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement made by the Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union and the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Switzerland, who spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Civilians affected by conflict situations continue to suffer the consequences of ongoing hostilities and are the main victims of violations of international humanitarian law as well as systematic human rights violations. Millions of people are exposed to violence on a daily basis, including sexual violence and exploitation, and they are forced to try to survive in very precarious conditions with respect to access to water, food, shelter and health services. In very many parts of the world, humanitarian access to the neediest populations is being deliberately blocked. Millions of children and young people are being deprived of education. Schools and hospitals have been subject to attack, and humanitarian workers are being targeted. Mass displacements that are due to fighting and violence are reaching levels without precedent since the end of the Second World War. We must stop this trend.

The inability to put an end to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations, which, we must emphasize, may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, underscores the importance of giving priority to prevention as well as to the fight against impunity. We must continue our efforts to translate normative progress into concrete improvements with regard to the protection of civilians on the ground.

While Member States have the primary responsibility to fulfil their international obligations to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law, it is nevertheless crucial to strengthen accountability and improve compliance with international obligations by all parties to armed conflicts. Where national authorities fail to take the necessary measures to ensure such accountability, the Security Council may, if necessary, play a more proactive role. Portugal recalls that the International Criminal Court can play an important deterrent role, complementary to that of courts at the national level.

Undeniable progress has been made in recent decades with respect to the integration of a civilian protection component into United Nations peacekeeping mission mandates. However, the United Nations and its peacekeeping operations should work to keep pace

with a changing world and the rapid transformation of the nature of conflict itself, and should anticipate the risks and needs with a view to finding more efficient approaches.

We recognize that the risks are higher and threats are now more global than in the past, and the operational environments in which United Nations missions are working are more complex and dangerous than ever. United Nations missions are increasingly having to struggle to protect their own personnel and innocent civilians on the ground in order to fulfil their mandates. The adjustment includes, inter alia, the United Nations having to endow its missions with modern and flexible capabilities, including through a human rights protection component, which helps to strengthen the performance of the peacekeeping operations themselves. In many respects, the preparation of peacekeepers is the cornerstone of the capacity-building process for missions in terms of the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate.

Portugal reiterates its commitment to continue to conduct training programmes for members of its national security and armed forces who have been deployed to international peacekeeping missions. Such training programmes cover such issues as gender equality, violence against women and girls, including all forms of sexual violence and gender-based violence, as well as trafficking in human beings.

Portugal has assumed its responsibilities with regard to the deployment of personnel and forces to United Nations peacekeeping operations and has already decided to strengthen its participation in that framework during the current year, 2016.

The results of the three review processes on United Nations peace and security efforts have led to certain clear conclusions and provided us with good avenues for the United Nations to explore in remaining relevant in the maintenance of peace and security. We believe that only a consistent focus on addressing root causes and intensifying political diplomacy efforts in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, together with the

humanitarian aspect of development and peacebuilding, will effectively enhance respect for international humanitarian law and promote responsibility on the part of all parties, as well as humanitarian access to those in need, thereby strengthening collective efforts to address the mass movements of people we are witnessing every day.

Recalling the words of the Secretary-General on the current humanitarian situation, “given the blatant inhumanity,” the international community can no longer remain an accomplice of collective apathy.