

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine) (*spoke in French*): At the outset I wish to thank the French presidency of the Council for this timely initiative and the opportunity to have a fruitful discussion on such an important aspect of peacekeeping as the protection of civilians.

Ukraine, as an active troop-contributing country and a country where an armed conflict directed from outside is raging, views the issue of protection of civilians as the most important task of peacekeeping operations.

Civilians continue to constitute the vast majority of casualties in situations of armed conflict worldwide. Each day civilians are killed or wounded, often with absolute impunity. Sexual violence destroys the lives of women and girls and young men. Artillery shelling and air strikes destroy vital infrastructure and unleash massive displacement. Families are separated, entire communities are torn apart and generations of children grow up without enjoying the right to education. It is disturbing that nearly 60 million people worldwide have been forced to leave their homes because of conflict, violence and persecution. Among them are nearly 20 million refugees, over half of whom are under 18 years of age. Humanitarian needs are at record levels and more than 80 per cent of the United Nations humanitarian funding is directed at conflict response. The fate of civilians in conflict remains extremely worrying, and much more needs to be done for their protection.

According to the outcomes of the three most recent comprehensive reviews of peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture and the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), the United Nations nowadays has to play a proactive role to prevent the outbreak, resurgence or continuing of armed conflict. Therefore, preventive diplomacy represents an important but underused tool that the Council should deploy more actively to ensure that peace is maintained. This tool should be brought in as soon as possible when a conflict is emerging. For instance, we see the need to expand the Council's highly positive experience in the framework of visiting missions this year in Africa to all parts of the world where situations warrant the Council's involvement on the ground.

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union delegation, I would like to make a few remarks in my national capacity. As a non-permanent member of the Council, Ukraine knows at first hand that sometimes the Security Council cannot react promptly to threats to a civilian population because the absence of a host country's consent stands in the way of the rapid deployment of a peacekeeping mission. However, it is hard to explain the Council's inaction in response to a direct request to host a United Nations mission, whose presence on the ground would provide additional protection to civilians and contribute to stopping the violence.

Our calls for Council action on such a request from Ukraine — where the civilian population continues to suffer from foreign military aggression — were not heeded. Russian-led illegal armed groups, with direct support of the Russian regular military forces, continue to wage war in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, with dire consequences for civilians residing there. According to reports on the situation in Ukraine by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), civilians have paid the greatest price for this conflict. Since 2014, OHCHR recorded more than 9,000 people killed and more than 21,000 injured in the conflict area in eastern Ukraine. Up to 2,000 civilians have been killed in armed hostilities, mostly as a result of the indiscriminate shelling of populated areas from various artillery systems.

In a situation where the Council finds itself blocked from discharging its direct responsibilities, Ukraine is compelled to use other possibilities at the regional level to establish an international armed presence in the occupied territories in order to protect civilians and ensure full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. I would like to use this forum to call on the occupying Power to implement the respective provisions of the Minsk Agreements.

Just a few weeks ago, we marked the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all of the Blue Helmets who are risking their lives to bring peace and stability to people in different parts of the world. Since its inception, United Nations peace operations have proved to be an adaptive instrument and flagship activity of our Organization.

The protection of civilians has become an obvious objective for United Nations peacekeeping operations, and the success of a peacekeeping mission is often judged by its ability to protect civilians. Ukraine is a State contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, has recognized the Kigali Principles and again committed itself to the policy that the protection of civilians is an overarching goal of United Nations peacekeeping.

We strongly believe that the peacekeeping operations authorized by the Security Council have to be provided with robust mandates for civilian protection. Any uniformed personnel who witnesses violence against civilians should not hesitate to do everything possible to stop it. We should view that the United Nations should build and enhance its strategic partnership with regional organizations and work alongside them, sharing its unique experience in peacekeeping activities. We welcome the close cooperation and partnership of the United Nations with the European Union and the African Union.

As we can clearly see from the Council's interaction last month with the African Union (see S/PV.7694), these regional organizations have their own vision and approach to the issues of regional peace and security. The African Union has also become one of the key partners of the United Nations in conducting peace operations on the African continent. We share the view that the common purpose between the United Nations and the African Union should be established throughout the whole process of peacekeeping activity, with protection of civilians as an integral part of these efforts. We see potential in establishing closer interaction between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In that regard, we would welcome United Nations initiatives aimed at contributing to the peace activities of the OSCE on the ground, especially when regional organizations' missions are deployed in an insecure environment.

It is a generally recognized approach that those responsible for war crimes, violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights are to be held accountable. Therefore, a peace achieved by parties to a conflict should not in any way mean impunity for perpetrators of atrocities against the civilian population. All victims of crime deserve justice and nothing less.