

Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
25 June 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Garen Nazarian, Representative of Armenia

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to partake in this debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for the presentation of his report as well as the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their tireless work.

We share the concerns raised by many of the previous speakers regarding innocent civilians in armed conflicts who, sadly, often constitute an overwhelming majority of victims. In particular, women and children continue to be the most vulnerable group, subject to various forms of extreme violence, resulting in grave humanitarian crisis with huge displacements of population in various parts of the world.

Mr. President,

Ensuring accountability and enhancing compliance with international legal obligations by parties in a conflict should be viewed as key elements of the Council's responsibility to maintain international peace and security which will require a deeper commitment and a broader vision of the future.

Bettering the use of established sanctions regimes and implementing the binding resolutions which call upon all states to adopt national legislation for the prosecution of individuals responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are important.

The accountability for such serious crimes is an important matter for my delegation in the context of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict resolution. The authorities of Azerbaijan have the primary responsibility to provide accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in connection with hundreds of thousands of Armenians who were displaced and became refugees as a result of ethnic cleansing and aggression by Azerbaijan in the late 80-ies and early 90-ies in response to the exercise of Nagorno Karabakh population's right to self-determination as well as hundreds of Azerbaijanis massacred in the settlement of Kojalu by the Azerbaijani National Front.

Those years, Armenia's entire border area with Azerbaijan was transformed into a battlefield. It resulted in destruction and occupation of many Armenian territories, including Arstvashen village of Armenia, as well as Shaumian, Getashen and other eighteen Armenian villages in Northern region of Nagorno Karabakh. For the last twenty years, these territories were invaded and still remain under the occupation of the Azerbaijani armed forces.

Azerbaijan aggression also resulted in significant casualties and losses among civilian population. Innocent civilians in Nagorno Karabakh and bordering regions of Armenia were subjected to a barrage of heavy artillery, missiles shelling and bombing. The Azerbaijani army indiscriminately fired at homes, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, and even ambulances.

During the mentioned period, when the civilians faced continuous escalation of violence, the Armenian side took decisive humanitarian actions to mitigate the suffering of civilians by exercising its responsibility to protect the population's physical security, fully in line with international humanitarian and human rights law.

Today, we continue to be highly concerned about the humanitarian impact of the use of force and use of weapons by Azerbaijan against independent Nagorno Karabakh and in densely populated areas bordering Armenia.

Mr. President,

As the Secretary-General rightly points out in his report, there are fundamental differences between the concepts of Protection of Civilians in armed conflicts and the Responsibility to Protect, although both are important and relevant in the context of protection. The two concepts, however, are connected in that they share the same legal foundation of rejecting the use of force and being diametrically opposed to "the rule by force" or "use of force".

Again, in the context of Nagorno Karabakh conflict resolution, both the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs and the UN Secretary-General have called upon the parties to implement confidence-building measures, particularly those which would remove the threats to the civilian population.

To this end, a recent Statement made in the margins of G20 Summit in Las Cabos by the Presidents of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries--France, the Russian Federation, and the United States--underlined that military force will not resolve the conflict and would only prolong the suffering and hardships endured by the peoples of the region for too long. Only a peaceful, negotiated settlement can allow the entire region to move beyond the status quo toward a secure and prosperous future.

We welcome this statement of the leaders of Minsk Group Co-chair countries and call upon Azerbaijan once again to cease all violence and provocations, including subversive activities and kidnapping of civilians along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and the Line of Contact with Nagorno Karabakh and strongly believe that the fundamental and lasting solution of the problem must be achieved only by peaceful means based on the principles of international law and within agreed international format.

Mr. President,

It is important that the Council is focused on the protection of civilians within the overall process of peaceful resolution of disputes. Our approach must be built on the understanding that any comprehensive resolution should impartially and fully address the root causes of the conflict under discussion in order to prevent their renewal in the future and should provide reliable and adequate security protection guaranties to the populations concerned thus ensuring their sustainable peace and development.

Thank you