

Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Conflict
November 9th 2011, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E Mr. Andreas Riecken, Representative of Austria

Mr. President, I would like to thank you for Portugal's commitment and efforts in the preparation of this debate, including by organizing a very fruitful workshop on the accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and the Council's role therein. Let me also express our appreciation to the Secretary-General, High Commissioner Pillay, ASG Bragg and the ICRC for their very instructive briefings.

Austria aligns herself with the statements made/to be made by the European Union, the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians and the Human Security Network.

We very much welcome the focus of today's debate on accountability for serious violations against the civilian population. In light of her office's role in an impartial monitoring of human rights violations and fact-finding, we are particularly pleased about the participation of High Commissioner Pillay in this debate.

As you know, the protection of civilians was one of Austria's priorities during our membership in the Security Council and resolution 1894 (2009) clearly recognizes the role of the Council in ending impunity. As outlined in the Secretary-General's last report on the protection of civilians, the mandating of Commissions of Inquiry by the Council is an important step towards ensuring that perpetrators are held to account either at the national or international level, drawing on the full range of justice and reconciliation mechanisms. We call on the Council to ensure a systematic and firm response in cases of serious violations and to this end, to use the full range of tools at its disposal. Also, we would like to underline the importance of reparations for victims of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, which might take various forms.

Let me remark that international mechanisms for monitoring compliance with international humanitarian law and reparations for victims of violations will also be dealt with at the 31st International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in Geneva at the end of this month. We are looking forward to this discussion.

Mr. President, let me use this opportunity to thank OCHA and DPKO for their consistent work and support in enhancing the implementation of protection mandates. The training modules on the protection of civilians as well as on sexual violence will be crucial for better preparing UN peacekeeping personnel for these tasks. Furthermore, we look forward to the guidance on reporting on the protection of civilians for UN peacekeeping and other relevant missions. It will contribute to ensuring systematic and comprehensive reporting on the protection of civilians and thus allow for appropriate action and firm responses by the Council in case of serious violations committed against the civilian population.

In Austria, we have taken first steps to design adequate training modules for our "peaceworkers" in the field. An interdisciplinary training program on the protection of civilians will be finalized in 2012. This program will be designed for

management and key personnel of various fields of responsibility and should allow these actors to better translate protection mandates into operational reality.

Mr. President, in closing, allow me to address two issues of particular concern for Austria: First, the threat posed to civilians by explosive weapons: Explosive remnants of war such as cluster munitions continue to endanger the lives and well-being of civilians even decades after their use. The adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions was therefore a landmark in international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians. In this light, Austria is deeply concerned about the draft text for an alternative legal instrument on cluster munitions to be considered by the upcoming Review Conference of the Convention on Conventional Weapons. This Protocol on Cluster Munitions, as currently drafted, would clearly undermine the existing international norms against cluster munitions and would contradict the humanitarian objective of the Convention on Conventional Weapons, aimed at the protection of civilians.

Second, attacks against journalists: The increase in targeted killings of journalists in recent years – both in conflict situations and in times of peace – is a worrying development. Impunity for those responsible for attacks constitutes the biggest obstacle for effective protection. As suggested by the Secretary-General in his last report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, we believe that the Human Rights Council has an important role to play in strengthening the protection of journalists. We have thus decided to make the protection of journalists one of our priorities during our membership in the Human Rights Council. Our objective is to strengthen the protection framework for journalists through concrete initiatives, which will focus on the fight against impunity as well as on preventing future crimes against journalists. We look forward to closely cooperating with interested Member States, civil society and other stakeholders in preparing this initiative.

Thank you, Mr. President.