

## **Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict**

**10th May 2011, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)**

### ***Statement by Mr. Barbalić, Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations***

Thank you, Mr. President for organizing this important debate. I wish to extend my gratitude to UnderSecretary-General Amos, Under-Secretary-General Le Roy and Assistant Secretary-General Ivan Šimonović for their important, irreplaceable work and of course for their valuable briefings at today's meeting.

The issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict is one to which Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches great importance. Unfortunately, serious and constant violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and deteriorating situations, including systematic violence against civilian populations, have continued during the reporting period in many countries. Civilians are still, and too often, targets in armed attacks and atrocities and are victims of human rights abuses, in particular rape and other sexual violence. It is the unfortunate and unacceptable reality of our times that civilians continue to be a main target for armed attacks and account for a high number of casualties in conflicts.

Regrettably, in 2010 and during the first quarter of 2011, we have witnessed a continuous and significant increase in civilian casualties in a number of countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire and Libya. The list certainly does not end there. Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns such violence and finds it both appalling and unacceptable.

In response to some of the violations that occurred in the most recent period, the Security Council took concrete steps relating to the protection of civilians, the first one being the adoption of resolution 1973 (2011), which authorized all necessary measures to protect civilians in Libya, and the second being the adoption of resolution 1975 (2011), which imposed sanctions on former Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo and his circle and authorized the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire to prevent the use of heavy weapons against the civilian population.

When it comes to the situation in Libya, we are gravely concerned over the references in the recent report of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in the country. We condemn in the strongest possible terms artillery shelling and sniper fire aimed at civilians and civilian buildings. In this context, we reiterate that full implementation of resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011) is of the utmost importance and that obligations deriving from those resolutions are not optional.

With regard to the situation in the Ivory Coast, we also reiterate our deep concern over the reported serious violations of human rights and the use of disproportionate force. We are alarmed by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country, where more than a million people have reportedly been internally displaced and more than 100,000 had to flee the country and find shelter in Liberia. We urge the international community to redouble its efforts and provide the much-needed humanitarian assistance. Allegations of the existence of mass graves in the country are worrisome and must be investigated. We condemn the use of sexual violence as a means to political ends and welcome the decision of the Human Rights Council to establish an independent international commission of inquiry.

We urge all parties to armed conflicts to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We particularly underline the need to combat impunity for perpetrators of violence against civilians. The struggle against impunity is an integral element in the protection of civilians that cannot be addressed seriously without prosecuting those responsible for serious crimes. Sanctions and other targeted measures play an important role in overall efforts, as well as in initiatives to improve compliance with the law by non-State armed groups. The Security Council should take every opportunity to send a message that crimes committed against civilians are unacceptable and that all perpetrators of grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law will be brought to justice.

Conflicts remain the major cause behind the increasing numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. In that context, we are deeply concerned about the unsafe and too-often impeded humanitarian access to

populations affected by conflict. We are also troubled by attacks against humanitarian workers, which must be strongly condemned. We believe that the Security Council should take a more consistent and comprehensive approach to addressing constraints on humanitarian access and should ensure accountability for grave instances of denial of access.

The challenges facing the Council with regard to the protection of civilians call for greater international cooperation and better coordination between the Council and other United Nations bodies and agencies. To that end, additional efforts should be made to prevent conflicts and their recurrence and to promote early-warning systems and effective responses to situations that specifically threaten civilian populations. Although the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies with States and parties to an armed conflict, the United Nations, with its systematic approach to the protection of civilians, must be, and is, at the helm of the global effort.

We believe that more comprehensive and detailed information on the protection of civilians in countryspecific situations is needed. Measuring progress in the implementation of peacekeeping mandates related to the protection of civilians must be improved. We support the recommendations of the Secretary-General made in the most recent report asking for the systematic application of the aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians and active use of the Council's informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians to discuss peacekeeping and other mission mandates.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches the utmost importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.