

Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians During Armed Conflict
Monday, 22nd November 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by H.E. Mr. Gilles Rivard, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the United Kingdom for having convened this open debate. I also wish to express my appreciation to today's speakers for their remarks.

We welcome the Secretary-General's eighth report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2010/579). The report offers a sobering view of the situation facing civilians in armed conflict. It also offers a clear set of actions that can be taken by the Council to better respond to protection needs.

Ten years after the adoption of Security Council resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000), the linkage between civilian protection and the maintenance of international peace and security has been firmly established. Subsequent resolutions, including those on women, peace and security and on children and armed conflict, have demonstrated the Council's resolve to better protect civilian populations living in situations of armed conflict, as has the Council's regular consideration of protection concerns and strategies in country-specific contexts.

In his previous report, the Secretary-General identified the overarching challenges we all must face, as well as the crucial steps to be taken to better protect civilians. Here, I would like to address a number of such measures that we view as being of particular importance.

First, it is important that the Council consider comprehensive approaches to the better protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict. We agree with the Secretary-General that new and innovative ways need to be identified to address country-specific situations that are not on the Council's formal agenda. In doing so, the Council could send a strong message that it is determined to take action against attacks deliberately targeting civilian populations.

Canada strongly encourages Council members to ensure greater consistency in terms of how the Council addresses protection issues. In that light, the aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians and the informal group of experts are important tools that could be drawn upon by the Council to a greater extent in order to make well informed decisions. The aide-mémoire, in particular, is an important guidance document that reminds the Council of the full range of tools at its disposal in situations where civilian populations are at risk.

At the same time, the Council would benefit from better defined criteria at its disposal to complement the aide-mémoire in assisting the Council in determining when and how to intervene. That is particularly true for those situations of which the Council is not actively seized but where there are concerns with regard to protection and where strategic and targeted attention by the Security Council could yield results.

Secondly, comprehensive protection strategies need to be fully integrated into the day-to-day work of United Nations country teams and peacekeeping missions. For the latter, it is important that protection-of-civilian mandates be fully considered in the planning, resource-allocation and training stages of missions. In that regard, we welcome ongoing efforts by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop an operational framework as called for in resolution 1894 (2009). We strongly encourage that Department and others to ensure that such a framework builds on the key indicators identified in resolution 1325 (2000).

In addition, protection considerations should ultimately inform decisions to drawdown or withdraw United Nations peacekeeping personnel, as well as decisions on how resources are allocated. But, protecting civilians is not just a job for military personnel. For all United Nations actors on the ground, both civilian and military, protection strategies should be clear, concrete and measurable, drawing on clear indicators and benchmarks. They should also be well coordinated with all actors — local, national and international.

Thirdly, Canada believes that enforcing strict accountability for those who target civilian populations is fundamental. States must fulfil their obligations to investigate and prosecute persons suspected of such crimes, and, where appropriate, cooperate with international judicial institutions to ensure that perpetrators are brought

to justice. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure that violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law are documented and reported to the Council. Such mechanisms can be critical in terms of providing early warning information leading to the implementation of effective preventive and protective measures.

In that regard, we applaud ongoing efforts to put in place an effective monitoring mechanism to report to the Council instances where humanitarian access is deliberately delayed or denied. We strongly encourage the Council to act on such information when it is received and to take appropriate steps to address violent attacks against humanitarian personnel as well as to deal with bureaucratic constraints that deliberately hamper efforts to access those in need of life-saving assistance.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians is inextricably linked to the maintenance and promotion of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Translating protection norms and our collective statements of support into concrete, effective, meaningful and measurable actions has not been and will not be easy. It will require the ongoing and full attention of the Council. The Government of Canada stands ready to continue to support Council efforts on this important issue.