

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of civilians in armed conflict, February 12th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Wang Min, Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations.

China appreciates the initiative of the Republic of Korea in holding this open debate on the question of protecting civilians in armed conflict. We welcome Mr. Kim Sung-hwan, President of the Security Council for the month of February, as he presides over today's meeting. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. We listened attentively to the statements by Ms. Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Mr. Spoerri, Director for International Law and Cooperation of the International Committee for the Red Cross.

Civilians represent the most vulnerable groups in wars and armed conflicts. In order to protect innocent civilians from harm resulting from armed conflicts, the Council has in the recent past adopted numerous resolutions and presidential statements, thereby playing an active role in promoting the protection of civilians, including women and children. However, civilians in many countries and regions are still subjected to devastation and harm as a result of armed conflict. The international community still faces an arduous task in terms of protecting civilians. China supports the Council in conducting in-depth discussions on the major challenges it confronts in considering the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, effectively promoting related work so as to achieve more constructive results.

I wish to highlight four points.

First, protecting civilians represents an unshirkable responsibility facing all parties to a conflict. All parties to an armed conflict should implement in earnest the Geneva Conventions, international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Council by making unremitting efforts to protect civilians. The Governments concerned have the primary responsibility for protecting innocent civilians in armed conflict. The concern and help of the international community should not replace the responsibility and obligation of the country concerned, related countries and their Governments, as well as the parties in response to conduct that violates human rights. As well as contributing to international humanitarian law, to pursue accountability and judicial justice, the first line of action is to fully utilize the domestic judicial system as the main channel.

Secondly, in carrying out actions to protect civilians in armed conflict, it is essential to comply with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular such principles as respecting national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. It is essential to avoid politicizing the protection of civilians. It is inadmissible to make arbitrary interpretations of Security Council mandates in the name of protecting civilians. It is even less so to carry out regime change under the same pretext. When it comes to protecting civilians, the Council should adopt a consistent position in all situations on its agenda. Double standards or select practices can only damage the authority and the role of the Council. When conducting humanitarian relief operations for the purpose of protecting civilians, it is imperative to observe such principles as humanitarian neutrality and objectivity. Only by winning the trust and support of host countries can we ensure the effective implementation of humanitarian relief operations.

Thirdly, in order to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, it is essential to make greater effort in preventing and solving conflicts. The Council should place the protection of civilians in the larger framework of peacefully resolving conflicts. It should actively conduct preventive diplomacy to prevent and contain conflicts. The Council should go out of its way to urge all parties to conflict to resolve their differences through such peaceful means as dialogue and negotiation to achieve political settlement and minimize civilian casualties. Resorting to military means can more

often than not result in bigger crises, resulting in more bloodshed and civilian casualties.

Fourthly, when considering a protection-of- civilians mandate for a peacekeeping operation, it is crucial to respect fundamental principles, such as the consent of host countries. Peacekeeping operations should always strictly observe the mandate of the Council by minimizing civilian casualties. However, they should also respect the sovereignty of the host country, ensure objectivity and impartiality and avoid becoming a party to the conflict.

Past experience and lessons learned have shown that the appropriate relationship between the two aforementioned parties will have a significant impact on the effective implementation of peacekeeping operations. We should also acknowledge that relying solely on the deployment of peacekeeping operations cannot resolve the fundamental issue of the protection of civilians. The Council and the international community should consider the long term by paying close attention to and fully taking into account the conditions prevailing in the host country. As a priority, they should take steps to strengthen the host country's security and judicial sectors and to improve its ability to effectively protect civilians on its own.