

**Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mr. Araud, Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations.*

I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this debate, the first on this topic since the adoption of resolution 1738 (2006). I thank the Deputy Secretary--General for his statement and the journalists for their testimony, which allows us to better understand the challenges they face on the ground.

All are aware of the importance France attaches to the issue of protecting journalists. Given the resurgence of attacks on information professionals, especially in conflict zones, over six years ago France and Greece together submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council. Through resolution 1738 (2006) the international community committed itself to paying increased attention to the issue of protecting journalists in armed conflict. The Security Council spoke with one voice at that time. It was a decisive step.

Today, we note that, unfortunately, that step was insufficient. Quite to the contrary, it was far from being sufficient because 2012 was perhaps the most murderous year. More than 120 journalists were killed in the exercise of their profession, which was double the figure for 2011. Several hundred others were imprisoned and sometimes tortured. Many were subject to intimidation, kidnappings, forced disappearances and arbitrary detentions. Women journalists are often the deliberately targeted victims of harassment and sexual violence. Bloggers, be they professional journalists or simply citizens, are also being targeted in an increasingly systematic manner.

Yesterday in Libya and today in Syria, journalists are subject to persecution by regimes seeking to muzzle them. Some 100 journalists, including four French nationals, have been killed in Syria since the beginning of the conflict. They paid with their lives for their resolve to show the world the reality of the indiscriminate repression of the Syrian people. I have special thoughts for Didier François and Edouard Elias, French journalists who were kidnapped in Syria a month ago and who are still being held.

In all conflict areas, it is local journalists who pay the heaviest price for practicing their profession. That is the case in Somalia, where journalists are regularly targeted by armed groups. Five have been killed since the beginning of this year. These figures clearly show international that the challenge of protecting journalists is one that we still have to meet. Given the worrisome situation, I would recall that it is primarily the responsibility of Governments to protect journalists and to allow them to accomplish their work without impediment and in an independent manner. That requires, among other things, fighting impunity against the offenders of such violence. That issue has been mentioned both by the journalists here and by some of my colleagues. States must systematically investigate, apprehend and try those responsible. Currently, 90 per cent of the killings of journalists go unpunished. It is also up to the international community, especially the Security Council, to consider the matter and take action to protect journalists. Some courses of action have already been pointed out.

We must recall and recognize the vulnerability of journalists in conflict situations and do what is necessary in a more systematic manner so that peacekeeping operations provide protection for journalists as civilians who are under threat. Violence against journalists is not limited just to armed conflict situations, however. The majority of persecutions take place in countries at peace, very often where journalists are reporting on cases of corruption or organized crime.

In a resolution adopted in September 2012 (A/HRC/RES/21/12), the Human Rights Council denounced that reality and proposed several courses of action. Moreover, the work done by

UNESCO should also be commended. The Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, developed by UNESCO last year, is an excellent initiative to fight impunity for the authors of violence against journalists. We call for its full and immediate implementation.

As we are all aware, freedom of information is at the heart of any democracy, whether when it comes to journalists, bloggers or war correspondents and associated personnel. They are the people who help us to understand our world and how it is evolving. It is clear for all to see that the knee-jerk reaction of the enemies of freedom is to gag the press, and that independent media are the first allies of democracy. Freedom of expression should be respected by everyone. It is our collective responsibility, and especially that of the Security Council, to work to ensure that this freedom be fully enjoyed.