

**Security Council Open Debate on Protection of civilians in armed conflict, February 12<sup>th</sup> 2013, Security Council Chamber**

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

I would like to thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Pillay and Mr. Spoerri for their briefings.

France endorses the statements to be made by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

For France, the protection of civilians and human rights are a priority. We have proven that in Libya and we have proven that in Mali. At the request of the Malian authorities, France made a timely intervention to halt an offense by terrorist groups that were threatening Bamako. The very existence of Mali was at stake. What we refused to tolerate was the establishment of a terrorist State within Africa. What we prevented was the spread of huge human rights violations like those already committed by terrorist groups in northern Mali — executions, rapes, amputations and destruction of cultural heritage. With Malian troops we liberated Gao and Timbuktu.

In that context, we were mindful that resolution 2085 (2012) stipulated the deployment of human rights and humanitarian law observers, and we call for their swift deployment. Once the situation is stabilized, a United Nations peacekeeping operation will have to take over from our efforts. The protection of civilians will be an integral part of its mandate.

Providing robust mandates on the protection of civilians is a first step, and France is working on that. But it is also crucial to provide peacekeeping operations with the means to implement their mandates. That is what we are attempting to achieve in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The plight of civilians in that country is tragic. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) now stands at over 2.5 million people. There are 500,000 new IDPs in North Kivu alone since the beginning of the crisis, triggered by the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M-23). Reports indicate that looting, rape, summary executions and the recruitment of child soldiers continues. With the Congolese army barely able to shoulder its responsibilities and the M-23 still threatening the town of Goma and the region, the actions of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) must be stepped up. That requires bolstering its mandate, as the President of France called for during his visit to Kinshasa.

But the protection of civilians also requires the strengthening the capacities of the Mission. The recent decision of the Security Council to authorize and use drones for observation of the Kivu and border zones will enhance the observation capacities of MONUSCO, and thus its capacity to respond. It will act as a deterrent to illicit arms trafficking and the movement of armed groups.

Finally, the Security Council has also supported the provision of additional helicopters to MONUSCO to ensure greater mobility, and therefore greater effectiveness of the force.

In conclusion, let me mention the battle against impunity. The protection of civilians requires prosecuting perpetrators of serious human rights violations. It is true in Mali — a situation of which the International Criminal Court is seized. Atrocities committed should not go unanswered.

That is also true in the Syrian Arab Republic, where Bashar Al-Assad, ignoring the calls of the international community, continues to kill his own people. The figures that Ms. Pillay gave us today speak for themselves: over 60,000 dead, mainly civilians; hundreds of thousands of people injured; tens of thousands of people missing. In violation of the most fundamental rules of international law,

the regime is using all the means at its disposal — heavy artillery, incendiary cluster bombs, ballistic missiles — and all in civilian areas. It spares neither women nor children. While 4 million people need emergency food aid, the Syrian authorities still refuse access for humanitarian aid to all populations in all areas. And they are increasing the number of obstacles to providing that aid. The perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in Syria, starting with Bashar Al-Assad, will be held accountable to justice.

That is why we reiterate our appeal that the Council refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

It gives no country any pleasure whatsoever to engage in military operations. France did so in Libya, which is now free from the yoke of dictatorship and is on the way to rebuilding after 40 years of dictatorship. It is doing that in Mali in a serious and determined manner while respecting international law as the situation requires. To those who continue to call for inaction, to those who prefer the comfort of words over the risks of action, to those who turn a deaf ear to the calls for help, we put before them the joy of liberated peoples.