

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

Statement by Mr. Loulichki, Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for organizing this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, presided over this morning by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Kim Sung-hwan. I also welcome the participation of the Ministers from Azerbaijan, Rwanda and Brazil. Likewise, I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the director from the International Committee of the Red Cross for their informative statements. Lastly, I wish to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for leading the consultations on the important draft presidential statement that we will adopt later on.

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), the protection of civilians in armed conflict has occupied a central position on the agenda of the Security Council, as evidenced by the numerous resolutions, presidential statements and other measures adopted by the Council intended to overcome the major challenges to protecting civilians. The track record of the past 14 years is encouraging, given the significant normative framework that has been developed. However, that is still insufficient both in terms of implementation and impact on the ground.

The report of the Secretary-General published on 22 May 2012 (S/2012/376) describes a difficult situation that often includes a failure by parties to a conflict to abide by their obligations flowing from international humanitarian law and instruments on human and refugee rights.

As the Minister from Rwanda pointed out, the situation of civilians takes on more serious dimensions in the context of recent conflicts, which are spreading in an extremely dangerous manner, as well as in situations involving terrorism, separatism and transnational organized crime. Such situations have become genuine threats to the security and lives of civilians, as well as to national and, at times, international patrimony. The capacity to acquire weapons and secure financing, as well as the dangerous alliances among various groups, mean that civilians are often held hostage by virtue of threats, intimidation and acts of reprisals by such groups. We hope that the next report of the Secretary-General will take up those new challenges, in order that the Security Council can have at its disposal information and analysis concerning this phenomenon in order to better protect civilians.

Peacekeeping operations with a mandate to protect civilians continue to be an important tool at the Council's disposal. Their effectiveness depends upon sustained support from the international community in ensuring the implementation of mandates by providing the necessary resources to prevent attacks on civilians and to strengthen the capacity of the country concerned to meet its responsibility to protect civilians.

In our quest to better protect civilians in armed conflict, we should continue to pay particular attention to women and children, who are often targeted for extreme violence and every manner of atrocity in time of conflict. Sexual violence, in particular rape, continues to be among the violence to which women and girls continue to be subjected. Children continue to be killed in conflict, often coerced into taking up arms and used as human shields by armed groups and forces. Given their vulnerability, it is incumbent upon all of us to pay ongoing attention to the specific needs of women and children.

Journalists and humanitarian and health workers also pay a high price for their commitment to protecting civilian victims and easing their suffering. This group also has the right to protection.

Conflicts produce thousands of refugees and displaced persons, who are sometimes exposed to inhumane practices on the part of the armed groups that control refugee camps. Those groups also commit grave violations of international law, human rights law and refugee law. Control over civilians by non-State actors in refugee camps, including sometimes the lack of distinction between armed elements and civilians, remains a continuing threat and inhumane practice whereby civilians are forced to live under threat, blackmail and want. In such conditions, complicity — direct or ill-advised — on the part of States hosting camps, as well as the total avoidance of any responsibility on the part of armed non-State groups amount to a denial of rights that is both unacceptable and immoral.

The report of the Secretary-General is clear on this in stating that

“Humanitarian activities continue to suffer from interference by State and non-State actors pursuing a non-humanitarian agenda that results in the disruption of humanitarian projects and the diversion of assistance” (*S/2012/376, para. 14*).

It is time that we correct this anachronistic situation by finding lasting solutions. That means registering refugees and carrying out a census in every single situation — steps that are both essential preconditions and permanent obligations in protecting civilians and providing assistance.

Given the challenges on the ground, reducing the number of civilian victims of violence entails long-term efforts based on promoting all aspects of the protection of civilians — legal, humanitarian and security — in all United Nations activities. The Security Council therefore cannot evade the imperative need to establish a protective environment built through development, strengthening capacity, promoting democratic values and peacefully settling political, social and territorial differences before they lead to armed conflict with unforeseen repercussions for civilians. On those two complementary aspects, the work of the Council in promoting and consolidating peace remains crucial and beneficial.