

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

Statement by Ambassador Libran Cabactulan, Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations

The Philippines is grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council on today's open debate on the agenda item "Protection of civilians in armed conflict". The Philippines has always considered this issue to be of special importance, taking into account its national and international dimensions. The Philippine Government continues to work seriously to protect civilians in armed conflict not only in its own national territory, but also the overseas Filipino workers who are sometimes caught in fighting in areas of conflict or potential conflict in other parts of the globe. Thus, ensuring their safety is a top priority for the Philippine Government.

I wish to thank the various speakers this morning for their very useful briefings. The Philippines associates itself with the position of the Non-Aligned Movement delivered earlier by the Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt. I wish to commend you, Sir, and the United Kingdom delegation for putting the protection of civilians in armed conflict on top of the Council's agenda. At the same, I commend the United Kingdom for its able and competent chairmanship of the informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians since its establishment in January 2009. I also wish to express our appreciation to the Security Council for its consistent and untiring engagement on this issue, both at the thematic level and in country-specific cases, since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) in September 1999 — the first resolution on the protection of civilians.

The adoption of resolution 1894 (2009) on 11 November last year once again reinforced the Council's commitment to the protection of civilians by taking concrete steps towards this end by ensuring humanitarian access, providing protection mandates to peacekeeping missions, and recognizing the need for the effective monitoring and reporting of cases. Despite the advances achieved in recent years, however, more challenges remain to be addressed, as pointed out by the United Nations officials concerned who have shared their insights on this issue. The open debate today therefore provides a good opportunity for us to take stock of the progress made on key issues and come up with new approaches to resolve them.

In recent years, the various reports and recommendations on the protection of civilians caught in armed conflict have given us a good panoramic view of the problems associated with this issue. Among the relevant recommendations are the need to include the protection of civilians in any conflict-resolution strategy, improving humanitarian access, the role of United Nations peacekeeping and other relevant missions in the protection of civilians and the establishment of commissions of inquiry to reinforce accountability.

The Philippines has taken those recommendations into account. In fact, we have taken appropriate measures to integrate them in the implementation of our national policies and work plan. I am therefore pleased to inform the Council of the following concrete steps that the Philippines has taken. First, as the Philippine Government continues to engage in peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the New People's Army, it has also taken every measure to ensure that, until lasting peace is achieved, civilians are properly protected and those who commit violence and wrongdoing against them are held accountable.

Secondly, the Philippines has consistently called for a system-wide approach where the work of United Nations bodies — namely, that of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — on this issue is effectively integrated into the work of other entities, specialized agencies and, in applicable cases, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

Thirdly, the Philippines has supported a more proactive approach through concrete efforts to protect civilians in the face of imminent conflict. This proactive way of protecting people will save more lives and reduce their vulnerability to the grim consequences of conflict. In that regard, the Philippines actively provides protection during armed conflict, especially to women and children, who are the most vulnerable segment of society.

I cannot overemphasize the commitment of the Philippine Government to ensure the protection of civilians caught in armed conflict. We have put in place mechanisms for investigation and prosecution to deal with such cases. In that context, the Philippines enacted a new law in December of last year, namely, Republic Act No. 9851 — the Philippine law on crimes against international humanitarian law, genocide and other crimes against humanity — which mandates the protection of civilians and provides for the criminal and administrative liability of commanders and other superiors under the principle of command responsibility. I would also like to assure Council members that the new Government of President Benigno Aquino III continues to adopt measures and implement good practices on the protection of civilians as a matter of priority.

In conclusion, the Philippines strongly believes that a culture of protection of civilians can be truly instilled if there is genuine domestic ownership of a culture of protection. In that regard, the Philippines will continue to work with the United Nations to promote and strengthen this culture of protection, which is actually rooted in the sanctity of human life and respect for the human rights of every person on the planet, especially in conflict areas.