

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 12th February, 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Wilson, Permanent Mission of United Kingdom to the United Nations

I thank you, Madam President, for holding this important debate today. I also thank High Commissioner Pillay, Under-Secretary-General Amos, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Director-General Daccord for their compelling and thoughtful contributions to this debate. The specific examples they have used are sobering and underline the importance of the subject that is before us now.

Fifteen years ago, the Security Council formally committed for the first time to protect civilians in armed conflict when it adopted resolution 1265 (1999). In the wake of mass atrocities in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was increasingly clear that the international community could no longer stand by and witness the massacre of innocent people. Yet, as we move towards the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, we continue to bear witness to the most brutal violations of human rights in conflict, from Syria and South Sudan to the Central African Republic. It is vital that we step up our efforts to prevent and respond to such atrocities.

Before I move on to the topic of today's debate, I want to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/689) and to reiterate our full endorsement of United Nations efforts to enhance its role in safeguarding human rights around the world through the action plan entitled "Rights up front". Our objective today is to establish and underline broad support for the United Nations key role of protecting civilians. I think that is why so many are here today to listen to and to participate in the debate.

Politics and protecting civilians should not be mixed: protecting civilians transcends politics. Sovereignty matters, but so too do the global norms that underpin the protection that we are seeking to uphold. Yves Daccord reminded us just now of how essential that is for organizations such as the ICRC, and in particular for the individuals that they serve.

We are pleased that the presidential statement just adopted today (S/PRST/2014/3) reiterates some of the most basic principles and commitments that have been made over the years by the Security Council on the agenda item, including through the attached aide-mémoire (S/PRST/2010/25, annex). The aide-mémoire has been painstakingly compiled from existing and agreed Council texts. It establishes the clear baseline against which we operate and, as Mr. Hervé Ladsous has reminded us, clarity is vital for those who operate in dangerous situations in the field.

Yesterday, the Security Council heard from Ms. Valerie Amos about the humanitarian challenges faced in the crisis in South Sudan. Today, she has set out clearly the huge difficulties being faced in Syria and the Central African Republic. Tomorrow, she will brief the Council on Syria. We believe that the Council can and must play a key role in alleviating the impact on civilians in such crises. That is why we strongly support agreement on a humanitarian draft resolution on Syria to improve the lives of the Syrian people, who are bearing the burden of the violence in their country. There can be no justification for any country standing in the way of a resolution that is designed to allow civilians access to food and medical assistance.

Early action to prevent conflict and mass human rights abuses remains vital. That must start long before peacekeepers may be required. Once peacekeeping missions are deployed, their protection mandates are a fundamental part of the ability of the United Nations to protect civilians in conflict. Those mandates must be fully implemented. Priority should be given to the protection of civilians in mission planning assessments and the allocation of resources and in activities on the ground. We encourage all mandated missions to develop protection strategies and to use all the assets of the mission to achieve that task. We urge mission leadership to establish effective coordination mechanisms so as to include all the relevant departments that enhance data collection and analysis

and that improve early warning and rapid response. From the police and the military to civilian personnel, where a mission is mandated to protect, that should be at the centre of their daily work.

We welcome the positive steps taken by missions, as outlined in the concept paper (S/2014/74, annex), and encourage a greater sharing of best practices among them. Regular opportunities to analyse strengths and weaknesses are also important and more information should be shared with the Council in country reports and briefings in order to highlight the challenges that missions face every day. As Ms. Navi Pillay urged, we welcome the effective use of the human rights due diligence policy so as to hold perpetrators accountable, including by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the horrific Monova rapes in 2012. We urge more consistent application of that policy elsewhere.

The United Kingdom commends the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for opening its doors to tens of thousands of South Sudanese civilians fleeing the eruption of brutal violence in September. I think that that is something of that the Council really needs to take note of. The actions of UNMISS saved people's lives, and the Mission continues to work hard with humanitarian actors to protect the 75,000 people sheltering on its bases. We will continue to support the Mission as it seeks to protect civilians more widely, including through monitoring and reporting on human rights violations and abuses and backing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The planning, allocation and effective use of resources are vital. The United Kingdom provides extrabudgetary funds to the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations for the Protection of Civilians Coordination Unit and the development of predeployment training modules on conflict-related sexual violence for the military, the police and civilians. We encourage all Member States to consider providing similar support.

The protection of civilians is among the Council's foremost responsibilities. Just as peacekeepers must consider the protection of civilians in every aspect of their work, so must we. Mr. Ladsous rightly reminded us of the limits of peacekeeping, as well as its great strengths. It is therefore essential that we assume our responsibilities and use the Council's authority to ensure that States shoulder their primary responsibility to prevent conflict, minimize suffering and ensure that the cycles of conflict and pain are not repeated.