

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

Statement by Mr. Kushneruk, Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations

First of all, let me join previous speakers in thanking the Lithuanian delegation for organizing today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts through United Nations peacekeeping and other relevant activities. We find it to be timely and topical.

While taking note of the few positive developments outlined in the Secretary-General's latest report on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689), the delegation of Ukraine remains concerned with the fact that civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in current conflicts. They are regularly targeted and subjected to indiscriminate attacks and other violations by parties to conflict.

The protection of civilians is a mandated task that requires coordinated actions in all spheres of peacekeeping operations activities, including the United Nations police component. While such protection is a core element of international policing, it also requires close alignment with the work of peacekeeping operations in the strategy for protecting civilians.

United Nations police provide operational support to host-State police on the protection of civilians under imminent threat. In addition, United Nations police assist in planning and conducting operations and investigations and in training the host-State police forces to perform crucial protection functions, which, inter alia, include maintaining a secure environment in camps of internally displaced persons.

The ongoing conflict in South Sudan has led to the need for accommodations for thousands of civilians in United Nations shelters. Police officers of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan were directly involved in the protection of civilians in those camps by maintaining public order and conducting physical checks. With the third largest contingent of individual police officers there, Ukraine reaffirms its commitment to further support the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and is considering the possibility of increasing the number of its police officers.

Ukraine strongly believes that host-State police can also contribute to the protection of civilians by preventing and overcoming direct physical violence, in particular sexual abuse. The police of the host State should receive special training to be able to perform such duties.

I would like to emphasize that special attention needs to be given to vulnerable groups in society, including children, women and elder persons; national, ethnic, religious and other minorities; and displaced populations, when defining and implementing the relevant activities in peacekeeping operations and when identifying security needs.

Ukraine has always been an active supporter of United Nations efforts aimed at protecting women and girls in armed conflicts. Our Government strongly supports all Security Council resolutions on women. We welcome the commitments of the Group of Eight on enhancing efforts to address impunity for sexual violence in conflicts, including its endorsement of the development of an international protocol on the investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict. In September 2013, Ukraine signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We consider demining operations to be another important area related to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Ukraine has extensive experience in demining and possesses modern technologies in that area. Our advanced logistics bases allow the training of highly skilled specialists within a short period of time. Ukrainian mine-clearance engineers are widely recognized in the world, including in the Balkan region, Africa and the Middle East. Our units operate under the standards and operational procedures of the United Nations, and we are ready to provide technical support and to share our experience within United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Turning again to South Sudan, I would like to draw the Council's attention to recent developments that have revealed the absence of the means required to carry out quick-response rescue operations of civilians in cases of emergency. That proves that there is a pressing need to take decisions on the rapid concentration of rescue units, especially military and civil helicopters, in a particular place to fulfill rescue operations.

Last December, three of our helicopters received gunfire while rescuing civilians and United Nations employees in South Sudan. Thanks to the pilots' professionalism, there were no human casualties. However, it had become evident that, in order to avoid, or at least to significantly decrease, possible casualties in the future, the United Nations must equip rescue helicopters with additional protective features, such as bulletproof bottoms, antiballistic and antimissile protection, reinforced rescue hoists and on-board fixtures for medical equipment. Night-vision goggles should be available for night operations. For example, we believe that the rescue helicopters mentioned could have avoided gunfire if the team had performed their operation at night using night-vision goggles.

We think that United Nations helicopters should be versatile, multifunctional and rapidly convertible into any version suitable to the flight task — passenger or cargo transportation, medical or casualty evacuation or search and rescue operations. A professional team of rescuers and medical staff should be included in the crew; plus an ambulance should be available to transport injured people to the nearest medical facility.

We believe that such modifications to helicopters would assist United Nations peacekeeping missions in providing protection to civilians in armed conflicts in a more efficient and safe manner. In November 2013, Ukraine held a special briefing with a presentation on the functionality of United Nations helicopters. In March, we are planning to convene another presentation focused on a United Nations multitask and convertible helicopter capable of protecting civilians in armed conflicts.