

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

Statement by H.E. Dr. Bashar Ja'afari, Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations

At the outset, I would like to convey the gratitude of my delegation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We would also like to thank all the speakers at the morning portion of the meeting. We believe that this important topic cannot be approached in a selective or biased way. For that reason, we believe, together with the entire international community, that protection of the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese civilians living under Israeli occupation is a crucial part of the international effort.

While the Council has discussed that important issue for decades, we appreciate it all the more at a time when serious violations affecting the Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan and the Palestinian populations in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip persist, owing to the barbaric Israeli aggression. That aggression includes continuing the settlements, aggression against civilians, imposition of the blockade, prohibition of civilian access to humanitarian aid, and attacks on the humanitarian assistance flotillas and the international peace activists aboard them. Among the extraordinary paradoxes that have confronted the international community for decades, since the development of the concepts of international law and international humanitarian law, the suffering of civilians in armed conflict continues, despite the increased frequency of Security Council meetings devoted to such issues. The international community has made exceptional progress in international humanitarian law over the past centuries, but that law must not be implemented by applying it to the weak but not to the strong, nor by exonerating authorities of foreign occupation from the consequences of violating the rule and principles of international law.

Israel has committed crimes for decades and has violated the most basic principles of international humanitarian law. It is not held accountable for its activities and its barbarous occupation and military and political leadership. The international community is reluctant to address Israel's violations and to put an end to them and is powerless to tackle Israel's practices and violations because of its impunity or exemption from implementing some international resolutions. All those factors have enabled the Israeli occupying forces to continue to disregard international law and to persist in settling the territory, imposing the blockade on Gaza, stealing land and preventing humanitarian aid from reaching the besieged people of Gaza.

Amid its aggression in international waters against the Turkish freedom flotilla — which was bringing humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, besieged for four years — the bombing of the United Nations headquarters and the death of civilians sheltered there, today Israel openly states its rejection of all humanitarian principles of international humanitarian law and conducts its feverish quest to try to reverse humanitarian and legal advances by talking of the need for Judaism in that racist State so as to be able to continue its purging, racist policies of collective punishment, which, moreover, are punishable by law. It seems that there are different laws for those who are in favour of double standards, double standards that exempt Israel from being brought to account for its behaviour.

Israel's aggressive behaviour means that this country is able to achieve what no other country or usurper in history has ever achieved. This aggressive behaviour violates the legal legacy and heritage of all humankind, straightforwardly without exception, and enjoys, despite all that, some sort of protection. The occupation of the Syrian Golan is similar to the picture that I have just drawn. Israel refuses to restore the occupied Syrian Golan to its motherland, Syria, and refuses to accept international resolutions, including resolution 497 (1981). In this context, we call upon the international community, in particular the General Assembly and the Security Council, to shoulder their responsibility to prevent Israel from continuing its violations, such as pillaging natural resources in occupied Arab lands, including the Golan. In conclusion, we simply do not know how long eyes will be averted from the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and its anti-humanitarian actions there.

We simply do not know when the positions that are regularly expressed will be made real on the ground. Will the Security Council progress from debates and statements to actual implementation of its obligations and

resolutions? That is the only question to which we must respond, for that is what is at stake when we talk about the defence and protection of civilians. It is an extremely important question.