

**Mr. Ybáñez** (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I want first to thank France, through Foreign Minister Ayrault, for organizing this open debate that is also the first after the publication of the annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2016/447). The report confirms once again that civilians are the main victims of armed conflict in the twenty-first century.

The recent World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul has allowed us to affirm the importance of complying with international humanitarian law. Conduct in hostilities is subject to a number of rules that cannot and should not be violated with impunity. I refer to the use of explosives in densely populated areas, barrel bombs and cluster munitions, among others.

Spain is particularly concerned about the growing trend of direct attacks on doctors and hospitals. The recent adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) — sponsored by Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay — has allowed us to further address this issue in the Security Council, but it is only a first step. Reversing this trend will require a coordinated effort of the Council, the Assembly and the Secretariat, in coordination with specialized organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières.

Ensuring humanitarian access has become, unfortunately, the new task to be addressed in various theaters of conflict, most notably in Syria, where hundreds of thousands of civilians are trapped in besieged or inaccessible areas. International humanitarian law is very clear that parties to conflict have a responsibility to ensure safe, free and ongoing access to the civilian population. Their failure to do so may constitute a war crime.

Before turning to the peacekeeping operations, the main subject of this open debate, I wish to refer to the protection of journalists in armed conflict. We are currently witnessing a growing threat to freedom of expression, which plays a key role in conflict prevention and the denunciation of war crimes. Spain therefore supports the creation of a post of special representative for this matter.

As the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) notes, when a peacekeeping operation is deployed with a mandate to protect civilians, it must do everything in its power to protect threatened civilians, and non-military strategies should be at the forefront of that effort. Peace operations should be conceived as political instruments, and the best way they can protect civilians is to help to end conflicts by supporting peace processes, promoting trust between the parties, reporting to ensure accountability, and generally using their political influence.

People are the victims of conflicts and must be at the heart of our task in the search for peace. This requires recognizing the centrality of political solutions and ultimately

prioritizing prevention and mediation to the utmost as essential tools in finding such solutions, without which there can be no peacekeeping in our time. This is particularly clear in the case of protection of civilians mandates, because without progress in the political settlement of conflicts it is very difficult for a mission to effectively ensure the necessary protection to civilians, as the reality on the ground shows in too many instances.

Of course, recognizing the centrality of political solutions does not mean that we can avoid paying urgent attention to the operational aspects of the protection of civilians. I will return to this point, but I want to emphasize that my country welcomes the general direction of our efforts in the context of the review of peace operations, including in such crucial as the protection of civilians. Not surprisingly, mediation and conflict prevention are two of the priorities of Spain's foreign policy, as is the protection of civilians. We are sincerely convinced that the review of peace operations is therefore heading in the correct direction.

Conflict prevention is closely linked to women and peace and security agenda, to which Spain is also particularly committed. My country led the review of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and is now working to put it into practice. Last October, the Security Council held an open debate (S/PV.7533) with a record number of speakers, at which it unanimously adopted resolution 2242 (2015). The big challenge now is to move from rhetoric to fulfilling our commitments in deed. Spain continues to work in that direction. Among other measures, alongside the United Kingdom it has headed the creation of an informal group of experts of the Security Council on women, peace and security, which we want to become a key tool for integrating gender issues into the discussions of the Council on the situation the countries on its agenda.

Naturally, the women and peace and security agenda is not relevant solely to the protection of civilians, given its aspects related to conflict prevention. Unfortunately, women and children are the primary victims in conflict, and as such are the first in line in need of protection. In that sense, I would stress the importance of deploying protection of women advisers in all United Nations missions. The same is true of child protection advisers. Protection mandates should also continue to enjoy support at the highest level to fulfil their essential task of ensuring effective and consistent protection.

Spain also wishes to support the proposal, made by Foreign Minister Ayrault in his statement, to strengthen protection of civilians mandates, focusing on combating human trafficking.

*(spoke in French)*

As a Francophile, if not Francophone country, we also welcome the organization by France of a ministerial meeting on peacekeeping in Francophone countries, to be held in Paris in the autumn.

*(spoke in Spanish)*

As I mentioned earlier, recognizing the centrality of political solutions does not mean that we can avoid paying urgent attention to the operational aspects of the protection of civilians. We must redouble our efforts to improve the planning and capabilities of peace operations.

First, if we want the operations to be effective in the protection of civilians, it is essential to improve their design, with clear mandates on the content of such protection. If we wish to create mandates that are clear, phased and properly adapted to the reality on the ground we must also improve information. In this sense, Spain supports the development of the new United Nations intelligence policy framework.

Secondly, as noted in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, we must close the gap between means and ends that is found often in the mandates of operations — a gap that has especially severe consequences in the case of the protection of civilians. It is imperative to equip our Blue Helmets with the assets and capabilities necessary to fulfil the missions we assign them, as well as with clear rules of engagement, and to make efficient use of the possibilities offered by new technologies.

Thirdly, we must redouble our efforts in training, both general and specific, on the implementation of mandates and force generation, and ensure that we have the best possible mission leadership.

Fourthly, we must ensure that there is effective dialogue among the Security Council, the troop-contributing countries and the Secretariat. We should also be able to have better information by developing strategic communication from the earliest stages of a mission's establishment and right through its conclusion.

I cannot fail to mention the absolute need to eradicate sexual abuse and exploitation. It is intolerable for those responsible for ensuring the protection of civilians to also be the same who assault them in the most humiliating way. We must move from a zero-tolerance policy to a reality where this scourge no longer exists.

Finally, I recall that sovereignty not only gives a State the right to control its own affairs, but also confers the primary responsibility to protect the population within its borders. We cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of thousands of the world's citizens. In the face of their pain, inaction is not an option. Peacekeeping operations with a mandate to

protect civilians are the best tool we have to strengthen the necessary implementation of the responsibility to protect. I refer specifically to its second pillar, that is, providing States with the crucial assistance they need to meet their primary responsibility for protecting their populations.