

**Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mrs. Perceval, Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations.*

I thank Mr. Eliasson for his briefing and his thoughts, as well as each and every journalist present here today.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a topic to which the international community attaches great importance. It is therefore legitimate and necessary for the Security Council to address it in an ongoing manner. I should like to thank the United States presidency for raising the issue of the protection of journalists. This is the first time it has been discussed in the Security Council since 2006 (see S/PV.5613), when the Council adopted resolution 1738 (2006). My country was a member of the Security Council at that time, too. I thank the presidency for the concept note it has provided for this debate (S/2013/393, annex) and express our appreciation for the statements made by the journalists today.

According to the Secretary-General's 2012 report (S/2012/376), the state of protection of civilians remains terrible. Among violations of international humanitarian law, it describes ongoing attacks by combatants on non-combatants; disproportionate attacks; displacements within and across borders; violence against women and children, including sexual violence; air strikes, including with unregistered aircraft; and other actions that prevent or hinder the provision of humanitarian assistance, such as deliberate assaults on hospitals, schools and humanitarian operations. In many situations on the ground, journalists are principal victims of such violations of international humanitarian law.

We know that journalism is a critical tool in the exercise of the freedom of information and the press. It is also an important instrument in post-conflict and conflicts situations when civil society does not necessarily have the resources to expose serious human rights violations or breaches of international humanitarian law. The reports of the Secretary-General and of the Director-General of UNESCO and other sources all reflect the frequency and gravity of attacks on journalists. The presidential statement adopted this year on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/PRST/2013/2) also reflects the Council's concern over such attacks.

In order to guarantee the protection of civilians and especially of journalists, we must duly consider two elements: respect for international humanitarian law in terms of attacks on journalists, and accountability. The Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, to which Argentina is a party, notes in article 79 that "[j]ournalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians". This norm set out in Protocol I simply confirms a rule of international customary law, which holds that journalists enjoy civilian status under international humanitarian law. In accordance with common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions on non-international conflicts, journalists and associated personnel are non-combatants and must be protected as such, along with their support staff.

The 2012 UNESCO report indicates, as other colleagues have said, that in the biennium 2010-2011, 127 journalists and media workers were assassinated. This figure represents an increase over the previous biennium. The report concludes that there is a growth trend in the number of deaths among journalists. It therefore proposed the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which was also adopted in 2012 by the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination. We hope that the Plan of Action, the second inter-agency meeting on which

took place in late 2012, will help to strengthen measures to protect journalists in conflict and post-conflict situations, and ensure accountability.

The two issues of respect for international humanitarian law and the fight against impunity were also reflected in resolution 21/12 of the Human Rights Council, adopted in October 2012. The resolution, which was sponsored by more than 50 countries, including Argentina, energetically condemns all violence against journalists and expresses concern that attacks on journalists very often go unpunished.

I should like to address one aspect of this issue that I believe strongly promotes the lack of safety endured by men and women of the press. It is often said that the first victim of war is truth. It would appear that what we are saying today is that its second victims are those who are responsible for telling the truth. A 2003 report of the International Labour Organization notes that there was a moment in the war in Afghanistan when attacks on reporters were more numerous than attacks on the military.

Who is responsible for the safety of journalists in a context where the dangers faced by members of the press in conflict situations are growing year by year? Economic and technological changes in the journalism industry create even more pressure on media workers to produce more news at greater risk and less cost. Some communication organizations, in their zeal to save on costs, use freelance professionals and part-time local correspondents, to the detriment of full-time staff and highly-skilled personnel. Although there is great variation as to how such independent workers are defined and treated by companies, at times some lack insurance as part of their compensation and may not have available ready cash that could help get them out of emergencies and foreseeable risks.

An environment of increasing informality in all areas of the labour market, combined with the precarious employment situation of war journalists, compounds the risks to which men and women are exposed during their work. A few days ago, journalist Francesca Borri wrote in the *Columbia Journalism Review* how routine it was for her to sacrifice her personal security in her work in Aleppo in order to be able to compete with the scarce resources offered by companies:

“[w]hether you’re writing from Aleppo or Gaza or Rome, the editors see no difference. You are paid the same: \$70 per piece. Even in places like Syria, where prices triple because of rampant speculation. So, for example, sleeping in this rebel base, under mortar fire, on a mattress on the ground, with yellow water that gave me typhoid, costs \$50 per night; a car costs \$250 per day. Not only can you not afford insurance — it’s almost \$1,000 a month — but you cannot afford a fixer or a translator.”

Another urgent and crucial matter is putting an end to impunity for grave violations against civilians, as part of the civilian population. Sixty per cent of the cases involving the 995 journalists who have been murdered in armed conflict since 1992 have gone unpunished.

In conclusion, it is clear to everyone that, even properly implementing all the necessary precautions, war reporters practice a risky profession in which their lives are endangered. Nevertheless, many of the attacks against reporters and many of the deaths catalogued in the past decade are neither necessary a condition of the profession nor an automatic effect of war. Rather, they are the outcome of specific working conditions that have been transformed through technological changes, new military strategies with regard to the press and transformations that directly affect the working conditions of journalists in general, thereby placing those who work in armed conflict in particularly vulnerable situations.

Argentina endorses two recommendations that we have heard from numerous journalist non-governmental organizations, namely, recognizing the special vulnerability of journalists in conflict situations and incorporating that perspective in the mandates of all peacekeeping missions

established by the Council.

I thank the President for organizing this debate. For this commitment to become a reality, we must focus our attention not only on conflict situations, in which journalists work every day, but also on the professional, economic and structural conditions that underpin their work, with a view to ensuring freedom of the press, information and expression.

I thank Ms. Kathleen Carroll, Mr. Mustafa Haji Abdinur, Mr. Richard Engel and Mr. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad. I also thank Mr. Robert Cox, a journalist with the *Buenos Aires Herald*, who in 1977 was illegally detained and kidnapped under State terrorism in my country for having been the first to publish, for the benefit of the international community, that my country had been systematically violating human rights by way of kidnappings, torture, disappearances and murder. Not only was he detained and kidnapped, but he had to quit Argentina in 1979. I again take this opportunity to say, never again!