

Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians During Armed Conflict
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Let me begin by congratulating the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of November, and I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. Civilians continue to suffer the brunt of violence during armed conflicts. It is against that backdrop that Member States of the United Nations pledged in the Millennium Declaration “to expand and strengthen the protection of civilians in complex emergencies” (resolution 55/2, para. 26).

The protection of civilians is a basic principle of humanitarian law. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols contain specific rules for the protection of civilians. In situations that are not covered by those treaties, in particular internal disturbances, civilians are protected by the fundamental principles of humanitarian law and human rights law.

Peacekeeping operations are one of the most important tools available to the United Nations for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Security Council’s thematic resolution 1894 (2009), as well as its resolutions relating to children and armed conflict and to women and peace and security, the mandating of peacekeeping missions to protect civilians, the adoption of the aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians contained in document S/PRST/2009/1 and the creation of the informal expert group on the protection of civilians, have been important steps forward. However, at the same time, the gap between the words in the protection mandates and their actual implementation still seems to persist. In that regard, my delegation would like to re-emphasize the importance of the principle of the responsibility to protect, as endorsed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1), in preventing harm to civilians in armed conflict.

My delegation urges all parties to conflicts to ensure protection of the lives and property of civilians. My delegation condemns all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and stresses the need to combat impunity, safeguard access for humanitarian assistance and protect the safety of humanitarian aid workers. My delegation welcomes the latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict as contained in document S/2010/579. The report highlights three action areas, namely, ensuring a comprehensive approach (ibid., paras. 102-103), ensuring a consistent approach (ibid., paras. 104-105) and ensuring an accountable approach (ibid., paras. 106-110) in order to enhance the protection of civilians.

The vulnerable situation of civilians in postconflict societies needs special attention. For peace to be sustained, civilian victims must be rehabilitated and reintegrated into their communities more effectively, and the perpetrators must bear the resultant cost. The presence of uniformed female personnel may play a pivotal role in protecting civilians in armed conflict. I would like to take this opportunity to refer to the efforts of the all-women Bangladesh police contingent working in a peacekeeping mission in Haiti. We believe that a female police force could also play a critical role in a State’s ability to protect its citizens. Finally, we would like to mention what my delegation considers to be two overarching themes for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The first relates to prevention and the building of a culture of peace. Prevention is at the heart of protection. The preventive capacity of the Organization must be enhanced. At the same time, Member States need to take steps to inculcate the values of peace, tolerance and harmony, which contribute to long-term prevention.

The second theme is that of coordination among all stakeholders. We believe that the protection of civilians is the primary justification for a United Nations presence in the field. My delegation stresses the importance of effective coordination, particularly among the various United Nations entities, namely, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs. In conclusion, my delegation expresses its grave concern over the violations and breaches of international law, including international

humanitarian law. For example, the total disregard and rejection of humanitarian and international law and their underlying values shown by the occupation forces in the occupied territories of Palestine for years now is a disgrace to all humanity. My delegation wishes to draw the international community's attention to the fact that the occupying State, as a signatory of the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulate the responsibilities of an occupying Power, cannot legally or morally absolve itself of its responsibilities to guarantee the basic human rights of the people under its occupation. The occupier State must comply with resolution 1860 (2009). My delegation strongly urges the international community, and in particular the Council, to take effective steps to ensure respect for and compliance with the Geneva Conventions in such a situation.