

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

Statement by H.E. Mr. Wang Min, Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations

I wish to thank Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their respective statements.

China is gravely concerned about civilian casualties in armed conflict. We condemn all acts that deliberately target civilians. I wish to emphasize the following three points concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, the protection of civilians in armed conflict must be strengthened in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention, international humanitarian law, and the principle of respect for State sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. National Governments bear the primary responsibility for protecting their own citizens. In a situation of armed conflict, the international community can assist in the protection of civilians, but such assistance should not substitute for the responsibilities and obligations of the national Government concerned.

Secondly, in strengthening the protection of civilians, attention should be paid to addressing the root causes and symptoms of conflict. The deployment of United Nations peacekeeping operations alone cannot offer a fundamental solution to the protection of civilians. The Security Council should prioritize preventive diplomacy in order to prevent and mitigate conflict. In a volatile conflict situation, the Council should commit to pushing for a strong and viable political process to achieve lasting peace and stability at an early date. The Council must focus on helping the affected countries to expedite security sector reform in order to build professional military and police forces and provide effective protection for their own citizens.

Thirdly, in order to ensure the effective protection of civilians, the various United Nations bodies and agencies must ensure a synergistic division of labour, with a clear focus on the effective implementation of existing commitments. The protection of civilians in armed conflict involves the development and evolution of international humanitarian law, which requires in-depth discussions with the broader membership with a view to reaching consensus. United Nations peacekeeping operations are deployed in varying circumstances and conditions. Their priorities should be tailored to local specificities. The one-size-fits-all approach will not work.