

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, August 19th, 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Osorio Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations.

Colombia deems it very appropriate that the Council is continuing to reflect on experiences and good practices in connection with States' commitment to protect civilians in armed conflict. This issue is particularly relevant to our country in that it has had to deal for nearly five decades with illegal armed groups that have engaged in terrorist activities and attacks against civilian populations.

Colombia restates its commitment to human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As a demonstration of its commitment, Colombia is preparing a major high-level international conference on assistance to victims, to be held next year. That conference is intended to establish synergies between the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, Protocol V on explosive remnants of war and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in order to deal with the issue of assistance to victims adopting a holistic approach.

We emphasize that international assistance in this field must conform to the conditions and principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182. Abiding by those principles while appropriately channelling collective efforts in support of national authorities takes on particular importance when such cooperation is taking place with countries that have democratic institutions and legitimately constituted Governments. My delegation would also like to reiterate how important it is for United Nations bodies to have clear information regarding the efforts of national Governments in terms of the protection of civilians, in establishing the priorities of their work, and in informing the United Nations about their respective situations. Verified, objective, balanced and impartial information includes the identification of shortcomings and challenges but also the identification and recognition of the progress made in each country. Moreover, while we understand that compliance with international humanitarian law by illegal armed groups is essential for the protection of the civilian population, nonetheless we feel that contacts with United Nations organs and agencies does not necessarily guarantee that their actions will conform with existing legislation on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

For that reason, the international community must bring the requisite pressure to bear to ensure that such groups repudiate violence and pursue their objectives through the institutional channels offered by a democratic State. Colombia therefore stresses that the appropriateness of such approaches should be analysed on a case-by-case basis; it is certainly a matter that should be decided by the States involved in a sovereign, autonomous and independent manner.

Following the invitation in the concept note (S/2013/447) prepared by the presidency, I should like to reiterate that Colombia deems essential measures aimed at prevention, protection and the guarantee of non-repetition for victims in situations of armed conflict. My Government believes that the rights of victims must be guaranteed and reflected in assistance, attention and reparation measures. We are therefore establishing a risk map as a means of identifying organizations and communities at risk, including women's organizations. We are also establishing a network of observatories for human rights and international humanitarian law. We are training public officials and members of the forces of law and order in matters relating to the rights of victims to truth, justice and full reparation; women's rights; the implementation of a differentiated approach; sexual violence; and the need to coordinate and publicize the various protection programmes.

We also believe that to promote the protection of civilians in armed conflict, it is necessary to devise and implement measures that are aimed, inter alia, at making the administration of justice more flexible, ensuring coherence among transitional justice structures, guaranteeing equitable and full reparation to victims, and prosecuting perpetrators. Colombia has initiated a peace process based on Law No. 1 of 2012, which guarantees that, when an armed conflict ends, perpetrators of crimes against humanity will be held accountable and the rights of victims upheld.

We express our thanks for today's very timely debate today and wish to conclude by stating that the measures taken in our country reflect our deep conviction of the need to devise responses and solutions that make it possible to protect the civilian population and to achieve national reconciliation and peace for the benefit of all.