

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

Statement by Mr. Eduardo Ulibarri-Bilbao, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations

Mr. Ulibarri (Costa Rica): It is an honour for Costa Rica to speak in its capacity as Chair of the Human Security Network and on behalf of its members: Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Switzerland, Thailand and Slovenia, and South Africa as an observer. The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is one of the priorities of the Human Security Network. Therefore, we would like to thank the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for the organization of this important debate, as well as the Secretary General for his report (S/2010/579).

In just over 10 years since the first peacekeeping operation with an explicit mandate for the protection of civilians in armed conflict was deployed in Sierra Leone, we have accumulated valuable experience and made important progress with a view to establishing a comprehensive framework in the Security Council through thematic resolutions on the protection of civilians, as well as other milestone resolutions, including 1325 (2000), 1612 (2005), 1820 (2008), 1882 (2009), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1894 (2009). We have entered a new era of multidimensional peacekeeping operations with large civilian components, including the promotion and protection of human rights, the facilitation of humanitarian relief, capacity-building, the restoration of infrastructure and services, and security sector reform.

However, despite the increased attention of this Council, the prevalence of civilian casualties and the number of people affected by armed conflict are still appalling. We are deeply concerned about attacks against refugees and internally displaced persons camps, as well as against humanitarian workers; the use of sexual violence and forced displacement as tactics of war; the prevalence of child recruitment; the proliferation of illegal trafficking and the misuse of small arms and light weapons; and the danger posed by explosive weapons, landmines and other remnants of war. We also deplore the continued targeting of civilians in situations of armed conflict, the indiscriminate use of force and the use of civilian populations as human shields in those situations. Another challenge is the role increasingly played by private security companies in situations of armed conflict. In this context, the Human Security Network takes note of the recent signature of an international code of conduct by around 60 private security companies, according to which they undertake to respect human rights and humanitarian law in their operations.

The Security Council, as the principal organ for addressing threats to international peace and security, should respond to prevent violations of international law and to protect civilian populations in all situations of armed conflict without distinction. This also includes assisting in creating the conditions conducive to the rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance while ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

We also recognize the importance of including the protection of civilians as a component of peacekeeping mandates, as well as clear guidelines and rules of engagement, without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the host Government to protect its civilians. In addition, it is also necessary to address other major constraints faced by peacekeeping operations, such as resources, equipment, the timely disbursement of funding, predeployment and in-mission training.

We welcome the Secretariat's efforts in establishing clear guidance and developing an operational concept for peacekeeping missions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Furthermore, a stronger partnership on protection with troop- and police-contributing countries, host Governments and local populations should be developed. Fostering international humanitarian law and practices is inextricably linked with the fight against impunity. Ending impunity for violations of international law and human rights law should be seen as part of a comprehensive approach to seeking sustainable peace, justice, truth and national reconciliation. The restoration and promotion of the rule of law, security sector reform and transitional justice mechanisms are also key areas where national systems should be strengthened and supported by enhanced international cooperation. The International Criminal Court, as well as other mixed courts and tribunals, can play an important complementary role in prosecuting persons suspected of committing mass atrocities. Lastly, the Human Security Network notes with appreciation the important work of the informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians, which was established in January 2009.