

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

Statement by Mr. Drobnyak Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations.

It is a great honour for me to address you here today, Madam President. First and foremost, I would like to thank the Argentine presidency for having convened this timely meeting, which, in our view, strikes at the core of the Security Council's primary mandate regarding threats to international peace and security. I would also like to thank the opening speakers for their important contributions to the debate.

The Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union (EU) has already spoken on this matter, and, as an EU member, Croatia stands by that statement. Nevertheless, I would like to add a few points, keeping in mind Croatia's extensive and unfortunate experience in the field and our particular interest in all of us drawing valuable lessons from that troubled history and implement them for the sake of improved lifesaving assistance and greatly improved protection of those who are in dire need of it.

At this point, I would also like to commend the Governments of Argentina, Austria, Indonesia and Uganda for the excellent work they have done in hosting a series of regional workshops. The results of those workshops were discussed at the outstanding Global Conference on Reclaiming the Protection of Civilians under International Humanitarian Law, hosted in Oslo by the Government of Norway. Having been an active participant at the Vienna and Oslo meetings, Croatia strongly supports all measures that can lead to improving the situation of civilians in armed conflict, and we would like to firmly support the Oslo Conference recommendations in that regard.

Although international humanitarian law has established a comprehensive legal framework to protect civilians from the effects of military operations, that framework stands in stark contrast to the situation faced by civilians on the ground in conflict-affected areas. Nowadays, in the conduct of armed conflict, it is civilians who often become the main target of armed attacks and atrocities — murder, deportation and ethnic cleansing, as well as rape and sexual violence and violence against health care facilities. That often happens not only as a consequence of war operations, but as a result of the methods and means used in conducting war. In that respect, resolution 1894 (2009) — with its strong condemnation of attacks directed against civilians as flagrant violations of international humanitarian law — stands out as an indispensable instrument to be used as much as possible.

In current times, which are still plagued by many armed conflicts, a strong need exists for an appropriate understanding of international humanitarian law. For its part, Croatia has invested serious efforts in strengthening the role of international humanitarian law and paving the way for the application of criminal justice against violators. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols occupy a special place in Croatia's international commitments, as they were the first international treaties to which Croatia became party. Today, Croatia is party to almost all international humanitarian law treaties and is widely recognized as a country with national legislation that is complementary to international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, Croatia continues to implement modern international standards through domestic legislation and to familiarize the general public with international humanitarian law. It goes without saying that civilians are the most vulnerable and unprotected group in any armed conflict — women and children in particular. But women can also play a specific and unique role in the prevention and resolution of armed conflicts, as well as in post-conflict reconstruction and peace consolidation.

With that in mind, Croatia has been actively engaged in the Friends of Women, Peace and Security group of countries in promoting the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. In cooperation with civil society, a national action plan on the topic was created and adopted by the Croatian Government two years ago.

Furthermore, Croatia adopted the Paris Commitments and Principles — documents that strengthen global efforts against impunity for crimes against children. It is our view that continued attention to the specific needs of women and children, as well as to their vulnerabilities during and after armed conflict, must form part of any effective policy for the protection of civilians and of every significant peacemaking or peacekeeping effort, including relief operations. Failure in that field involves much more than a lack of political success: such failure is measured in human lives and misery.

Individual States bear the responsibility to protect their populations from such appalling atrocities. At the same time, the international community has a responsibility to help protect populations and to take collective action through the Security Council — if and when national authorities manifestly fail to protect their population.

Furthermore, the fight against impunity and the establishment of the rule of law are of crucial significance in ensuring that the most severe crimes do not go unpunished. Croatia firmly believes that those who violate human rights in armed conflicts today should know that they will face justice tomorrow.

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to call attention to the fact that Croatia, in its capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, will organize, together with UN-Women, a special meeting, on the margins of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, dedicated to the economic empowerment of women for peacebuilding. It will take place on 26 September.