

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
Tuesday, 26th October 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity, following the comprehensive briefing just made by Ms. Valerie Amos, whose recommendations I fully support, to inform the Security Council about the latest efforts by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to better protect civilians in the eight missions we have been mandated to carry out, as well as, more generally, on the progress we have made in carrying out those crucial and difficult missions.

Recent tragic incidents, notably in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which the lives and safety of civilians have been so grossly disregarded by armed militias are a tragic reminder of both the importance of protecting civilians where we are mandated to do so and of the immense complexities that this entails. We must acknowledge and communicate that peacekeeping operations cannot protect all civilians at all times, especially when they are deployed over very vast areas and in the midst of ongoing conflict. Both the international community and those whom we endeavor to protect must understand that peacekeeping operations cannot be regarded as a substitute for State authority. The protection of civilians will ultimately depend upon stable and legitimate State institutions. Peacekeeping operations can augment their capacities and help to build them, but cannot, and should not, replace them.

That being said, over the course of 2010 the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support undertook a very detailed examination of how we can improve our performance in protecting civilians. With the operational concept developed earlier this year, we have focused on five principal tracks to improve our planning and implementation of our civilian protection mandates. Those include the development of a strategic framework to provide guidance for missions in elaborating comprehensive strategies for the protection of civilians; predeployment and in-mission training modules that include a range of scenario-based exercises for all mission components; an evaluation of the resource and capability requirements necessary for the implementation of protection mandates; a thorough examination of protection planning processes, both predeployment and within the mission; and, lastly, capability development efforts, including addressing capability standards for military units, to better articulate the performance requirements to meet this task as well as the other modern mandated peacekeeping tasks.

Our efforts in those areas have already had an impact on the ground. In addition to the three missions that previously developed protection of civilians strategies, four missions are in the process of doing so based on the draft general guidance that is being developed here at Headquarters. That guidance assists missions in undertaking a systematic analysis of the relevant threats facing civilians in their areas of operation, so as to better orient their efforts towards addressing them. That includes identifying the capacities that are required to ensure the effective implementation of protection of civilians mandates.

One of the most prominent examples of the implementation of such strategies is certainly the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which has already developed and is continuing to implement a number of innovative and practical approaches. Recent efforts have focused on further enhancing the situational awareness of MONUSCO troops and, as the Council is aware, on improving communication between them and the population. Such measures must of course be accompanied by the ability to respond when and as necessary. It is in those situations that capacity shortages, especially in terms of aviation, are felt most acutely.

In the Sudan, in the crucial period leading up to the referendum, the United Nations Mission in the Sudan has finalized, in consultation with the country team, a strategy for the protection of civilians, which strengthens the coordination between the Mission's civilian and military components and envisages joint mapping processes of protection needs, actors and potential emergencies. In Darfur and Côte d'Ivoire, missions are finalizing comprehensive strategies that include analyses of current and potential protection threats and vulnerabilities that civilians face, as well as risk mitigation measures. For the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the primary threats to the protection of civilians are civil disorder and violent crime, including sexual violence.

UNMIL and the Liberian National Police are working to develop clear and practical procedures to enable community members to alert the Mission or Liberian authorities in the event of an emergency or major incident.

As we look at the planning and implementation of the protection of civilians in greater detail, it remains clear that the efforts that we have undertaken thus far constitute only the beginning of what will necessarily be a continuous process. Peacekeepers in the military, police and civilian components continue to request more detailed operational guidance on the contributions they can make to the protection of civilians.

While we have made progress in bringing clarity to how peacekeeping operations implement protection of civilians mandates, we still require a more detailed articulation of how key functions within missions can more effectively protect civilians on a daily basis. This operational guidance will be a critical part of the protection toolkit that we are developing. In conclusion, it must be reiterated that our efforts to improve the implementation of protection of civilians mandates within United Nations peacekeeping operations is not a job for DPKO or the Department of Field Support alone. It is critical that our key partners, in particular troop and police contributors that ultimately deploy personnel to protect civilians in the mission area, are fully engaged. Ensuring that they are aware of the expectations to protect civilians that have been placed upon them and that they are prepared to meet them is a shared task that will require a strong and focused partnership moving forward. Likewise, the support and engagement of the Council will be critical, in particular in ensuring that missions with protection of civilians mandates are fully resourced for the task, as we endeavour to bring greater operational clarity to some of the mandate language typically used in mandate missions to protect civilians and bring political leverage to bear on the parties to conflict.