

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

Statement by Mr. Shalva Tsiskarashvili, Deputy Permanent Representative of Georgia at the United Nations

Let me join previous speakers in thanking you, Mr. President, for organizing today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for giving us this opportunity to address the Security Council. Georgia fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

More than a decade has passed since the Council began deliberating this important subject. Throughout the past 11 years, the Council has adopted six resolutions and eight presidential statements on the protection of civilians, but unfortunately these measures are not sufficient. Civilians continue to be severely impacted by armed conflicts around the world. The deliberations of the Security Council clearly indicate the need to further strengthen the protection of civilians through compliance with the norms of international humanitarian and human rights law. Every situation where civilians suffer from violence caused by armed conflict requires more attention from the international community.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Security Council that Georgia recently became a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. By doing so, Georgia reaffirmed its strong commitment to consolidated international efforts aimed at protecting the rights of children affected by armed conflicts worldwide. Every time the opportunity arises to discuss this important matter in open debate here in this Chamber, my delegation provides the Council with detailed information on the situation concerning civilians living under foreign occupation in two regions of my country, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

Since our last address, nothing has changed on the ground. Ethnicity-based and other gross and massive violations of human rights law and humanitarian law happen on a daily basis. The population continues to suffer from insecurity and discrimination; living under the threat of expulsion, forced conscription and passportization; losing their ethnic identity; and being denied their right to property and education in their mother tongue, not to mention the impact of conflict and violence, especially on the younger generation. Moreover, the authorities in effective control have taken measures to deprive these individuals of their right to free movement across the administrative borderline, which has turned into an occupation line. We believe that such violence must be seen as a fundamental violation of the right of every individual to life and development, and universally condemned.

Resolution 1894 (2009), adopted a year ago, reaffirmed the need to focus on the issue of humanitarian access. The very same message has been reiterated in the Secretary-General's most recent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2010/579), in which the Secretary-General suggests that humanitarian access is the fundamental prerequisite for humanitarian action. A similar message has been delivered by Mr. Walter Kälin, Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, in his reports on Georgia and its occupied regions.

I would like once again to draw the Council's attention to the problem of humanitarian access to the Tskhinvali region of Georgia, where the occupying Power continues to block humanitarian aid and international humanitarian actors and demands that the region be entered exclusively from its own territory. This policy represents yet another clear infringement of the principles of international humanitarian law, as well as of paragraph 3 of the European Union-brokered ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 64/296 on the status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region, Georgia, of 7 September 2010. This resolution represents a powerful manifestation of the will of the international community to stand up for the rights of all who continue suffer the consequences of armed conflict. Here, I would like to stress that Georgia continues to support the efforts of the United Nations and its agencies to alleviate the suffering of civilians on the ground. Let me assure the Council that my country stands ready to work with the international community in addressing current challenges and ensuring genuine progress in this field.