

## **Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict**

**10th May 2011, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)**

*Statement by Mr. Wittig, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations*

At the outset, let me thank today's briefers for their valuable contributions. Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Today's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict comes at a crucial moment. Only last week, the International Criminal Court announced its intention to indict three Libyan officials whom it holds responsible for organized crimes against humanity perpetrated against civilians in Libya. Following the landmark resolution 1970 (2011), that is an important step in enhancing accountability for violations of international law and ending the so-called culture of impunity.

Regarding the responsibility to protect, let me be clear — it is first and foremost the responsibility of each State to protect its civilian population from violence. However, the international community will not turn a blind eye when there is a blatant disregard of this obligation. That is a message that applies not only to Libya; indeed, it goes beyond Libya.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of violence in armed conflict. Recent events in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya reconfirm this fact in a tragic way. The indiscriminate and excessive use of force against civilians in all its various forms cannot and must not be accepted by the Security Council and the international community at large.

Let me briefly touch upon some of the situations of particular concern to us. First, with regard to Syria, we are deeply shocked by the violence and brutality of the internal repression orchestrated by the Syrian authorities against unarmed and peaceful protesters. The use of tanks and heavy artillery against the civilian population in Dar'a, Baniyas and other cities is deeply worrying. The Syrian authorities clearly stand at a fork in the road. We strongly urge the Syrian Government to end its military repression of its own population and to respect human rights. Those responsible for the killings should be held accountable.

In order to make this message clear, we have worked for the European Union to impose restrictive measures against Syria and persons responsible for the violent repression. These measures have come into force today. The ongoing violence and the regional implications also require that we continue to address the situation in Syria in the Security Council.

On Afghanistan, we remain seriously concerned about the intolerably high number of conflict-related civilian casualties. The large majority of them are caused by indiscriminate attacks by the Taliban, AlQaida and other violent armed groups. We would also like to take note of the continued progress made by Afghan and international forces in minimizing civilian casualties.

The situation of the civilian population in Somalia remains a cause of grave concern, as are the ongoing activities of the Lord's Resistance Army, in particular the abduction of children in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, southern Sudan and the Central African Republic.

On Sri Lanka, Germany welcomes the report of the Panel of Experts. The report reiterates the need for accountability in that country. The findings of the report should encourage the Government of Sri Lanka to set up a credible investigation and accountability process. We urge Sri Lanka to closely cooperate with the United Nations in this regard.

Since the last open debate on protection issues in November last year (S/PV.6427), the Security Council has further developed its comprehensive normative framework on protection issues. We note with appreciation that four out of the current seven United Nations peacekeeping operations with a protection mandate have already developed comprehensive strategies for the protection of civilians.

Heeding your call, Mr. President, and for the sake of brevity, I will abridge my written statement and conclude by drawing the Council's attention to one group of civilians with particular protection needs in armed conflict, namely, children. Children are sexually abused, killed and/or maimed and sometimes even used as suicide bombers by parties to a conflict. In armed conflicts, schools and hospitals, which are essential for the development and well-being of children, are deliberately attacked and destroyed.

Together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Coomaraswamy, with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict — which I have the honour to chair — has continued to make tangible progress in demobilizing child soldiers and in enhancing compliance with international law by State and non-State parties to conflict. I urge the members of the Council, as well as the wider United Nations membership to continue to lend their valuable support to this common endeavour.