

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

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

*Statement by Mr. Manjeev Singh Puri, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations*

I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing today's debate on the protection of civilians, which in our view is very timely and relevant. I would also like to thank the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos and Assistant Secretary-General Ivan Šimonović for their useful briefings and statements. Indeed, in my opinion, the very presence here of representatives of those three organs of the United Nations allows us to place our discussions and debate in the right context.

It has been India's consistent view that the foremost responsibility of every State is to protect its population. In fact, one of the cardinal provisions of the Indian Constitution is that the right to life is one of the fundamental rights of all citizens, from which no derogation is permissible, even in times of emergency.

India has demonstrated its commitment to that right at the international level as well. India has contributed more troops to peacekeeping operations than any other Member State. Our troops and police officers have been at the forefront of turning this Council's word into deed. They were protecting civilians long before the term became common usage in the Council. More than five decades ago, Indian soldiers defended the civilians of the Congo as part of the United Nations mission. Our contribution continues today in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in other United Nations missions.

We have remained at the cutting edge of many United Nations operations in places where civilians were under threat. Today, we have a female formed police unit — the first such formation composed entirely of women — in the United Nations Mission in Liberia. Thus, India brings to this table a quantum of experience in actually protecting civilians in peacekeeping missions that is unique in its relevance, variety and depth.

We have also participated actively in the normative debates of the Council and the General Assembly on protection issues. In that tradition of constructive engagement, a seminar held recently in New Delhi broke new ground in drawing from the operational experience of peacekeepers to further evolve that agenda. I am very glad to see that our colleague from DPKO was present in New Delhi at the time of that seminar.

An enormous amount of the Council's attention has been focused recently on protection issues, with the Council adopting a number of resolutions and statements on the protection of civilians and related issues of violence against women and children in situations of armed conflict. In bringing those protection issues within the purview of matters relating to international peace and security, the Council has placed them squarely at the centre of the conflict resolution and peacekeeping agenda. That intense focus has, in some situations of conflict, shifted attention from the tried and tested methods of mediation and negotiation that are the staples of conflict resolution.

When applied as a basis for Security Council action, efforts to protect civilians must respect the fundamental aspects of the United Nations Charter, including the sovereignty and integrity of Member States. Any decision to intervene that is associated with political motives detracts from that noble principle and needs to be avoided. Also, the response of the international community must be proportional to the threat, involve the use of appropriate methods and make adequate resources available.

It is important that the principle of protecting civilians be applied in a uniform manner. In the case of conflict, all sides need to abide by it. We must also be clear that the United Nations has a mandate to intervene only in situations where there is a threat to international peace and security. Any decision of the Council to intervene must be based on credible and verifiable information, which in turn requires much greater information flows when the Council is seized of a situation.

In that context, I cannot but ask the question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodies?* Who watches the guardians? There is a considerable sense of unease about the manner in which the humanitarian imperative of protecting civilians has been interpreted for actual action on the ground.

Let me now turn to the question of protecting civilians in peacekeeping missions. In the view of my delegation, the central issue in the implementation of the protection agenda is the question of resources. The resources that are being made available to current peacekeeping operations so as to fulfil those ambitious objectives are simply insufficient.

It is also important that expectations regarding the work of peacekeepers be realistic and take into consideration the multiple resource constraints under which they function. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, has one peacekeeper for every 1,500 square kilometres. The Mission lacks enabling assets to allow the existing complement of peacekeepers to move and deploy in the areas of operation. The manner in which those Missions are being made to operate on shoestring budgets and being constantly asked to do more with less does not augur well. All efforts of the Council to further the protection agenda will come to naught if that resource gap is not addressed.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to stress that force is not the only way of protecting civilians. It should be only the measure of last resort and be used only when all diplomatic and political efforts fail. There can be no substitute for national will and national efforts in creating an environment where civilians are secure. The efforts of the Council and the international community must be directed at assisting national authorities in developing those capabilities. That is the only sustainable method of protecting civilians because, as I said at the beginning of my statement, the foremost responsibility of every State is to protect its civilians.