

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

Statement by H.E. Mr. Cesare Ragolini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations

I, too, wish to express my deep appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, for her briefing, which gave us a broad perspective of the challenges we face in the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Alain Le Roy, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay, and the Director-General for the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, for their contributions.

Italy fully endorses the statement to be made by the European Union (EU) delegation and wishes to make some additional observations.

Italy is committed to combating impunity for international crimes and believes that that fight is inextricably linked to the principle of accountability. The Council has a crucial role to play in that regard. It must be ready to take prompt action against those who continuously undermine the credibility of that commitment.

Non-compliance with international humanitarian laws inevitably leads to the injury or death of what is becoming a growing number of civilians every year. Every measure should be taken to prevent violence, starting with the implementation of national laws.

We share concerns over the severity and prevalence of constraints on humanitarian access, as well as the frequency and gravity of attacks on humanitarian personnel. Consistent improvements in humanitarian access will only be made if States promote a culture of protection, taking into account the particular needs of women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Active hostilities, bureaucratic constraints and economically motivated attacks on humanitarian supplies are major obstacles on the path to protecting those in need.

This is why the acceptance of independent, neutral and impartial humanitarian action must be broadened. Under international law, primary responsibility for the security and protection of humanitarian personnel lies with the Government hosting a United Nations operation. Effective measures to enable relief activities during active fighting, including calling on parties to allow safe passage for civilians trying to escape from conflict zones, could represent a concrete and tangible set of actions that could be implemented.

We welcome the encouraging developments in the protection of civilians by peacekeeping missions as mentioned in the Council's latest report (S/2010/579). The protection of civilians, I wish to reiterate, is first and foremost the responsibility of the State, which may require assistance in the fulfilment of its duties in that area.

When a Government lacks the resources to ensure compliance with its obligations, the protection of civilians is a moral obligation inherent to peacekeeping, although peacekeepers are not the only actors involved. Greater efforts should thus be made to ensure that peacekeeping mandates include explicit reference to civilian protection, clear strategies for pursuing it and careful monitoring of the implementation and impact of these mandates.

The security of civilians in post-conflict environments is also critical to the legitimacy and credibility of United Nations peacekeeping missions, the peace agreements they are deployed to implement and the United Nations itself.

These are difficult tasks that require a consistent approach, including advanced planning to ensure that future and current missions have the authority and capacity to protect. At the earliest stages of planning, threats to civilians must be taken into consideration, and peacekeeping missions must be properly tasked with clear, credible and achievable mandates to be implemented by military and police personnel who have received the appropriate training before deployment.

Training is crucial. It should be made standard on the basis of clear operational guidelines regarding the implementation of protection mandates by peacekeeping missions. Such guidelines should be drafted in close cooperation among the United Nations and other organizations involved, such as the African Union and the European Union.

Italy, in cooperation with the Secretariat, makes a key contribution to that sector through its Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU). In five years, the Center has already trained 3,630 trainers to prepare national contingents for deployment as formed police units.

The protection of civilians is greatly enhanced when the police and civilian components of peacekeeping missions are also involved. Hence, there is the need to strengthen the police component and integrate civilian capacities, particularly in the rule of law sector. That is indispensable to helping a country to fully resume national ownership and responsibility in the crucial area of protecting civilians.

Today, there is greater attention to understanding and advancing the protection of civilians. Thanks to remarkable efforts, there have been improvements in United Nations peacekeeping operations' ability to protect, but more needs to be done to transform our ambition into realities on the ground and to establish precise benchmarks to monitor implementation.

Resolution 1674 (2006) reaffirms the principle of the responsibility to protect. As we have stressed on previous occasions, that principle should not be perceived in an adversarial manner but rather as an instrument available to the international community for settling conflicts, provided that the conditions referred to in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 Outcome Document are met.

The informal interactive dialogue of the General Assembly on early warning, assessment and the responsibility to protect was an important step towards understanding and implementing the concept. We look forward to new opportunities to continue that dialogue.