

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

Statement by Mr. Mohammed Loulichki Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations

My delegation's participation in this debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict is based on the importance that my country attaches to this goal and on its commitment, alongside the United Nations, to ensuring its implementation.

Immediately after having suffered the horrors of the Second World War, the international community established important legal standards to protect civilians affected by armed conflict. These include the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and various international human rights instruments, whose main objective is to spare civilian populations from suffering, especially women, children and the elderly. For over 11 years, the Council has addressed this issue and has thus enriched the debate and created worldwide support for a sustained and concerted effort of the international community on the issue.

Despite this progress, we are unfortunately forced to note that civilian populations continue to be the first victims of armed conflict. That reality requires all parties to armed conflict to abide by international law and refrain from any actions that cause harm to civilians. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2010/579) pursuant to resolution 1894 (2009) notes a number of positive international developments as well as the many challenges that remain. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. We would, however, like to address some aspects of the issue under consideration.

The best way to protect civilians in armed conflict is to prevent conflicts from erupting and to find lasting solutions to those that exist. In many situations, it is important that the parties involved demonstrate the political will and resolve necessary to finding lasting compromise solutions to end the suffering of affected populations. Neighbouring States — which, in a number of cases, are parties, in name or in fact, to conflict — must act responsibly to that end. The Security Council and the international community must support parties in this process by creating conditions conducive to putting an end to these conflicts. Primary responsibility, however, falls on the nation State to protect its citizens and other peoples living in its territory. It should do so, of course, in adherence to current international obligations, rules and laws.

We commend the Council's efforts to provide greater assistance to populations at risk. These efforts are strengthened by the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The effective implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) will undoubtedly help us to provide better protection for women. Similarly, the fight against the use of child soldiers must remain a priority of the international community.

Refugees are the very first to suffer from the eruption or continuation of conflicts. Host States have the obligation to ensure that they fully enjoy their rights, including the right of return. In protecting refugees, it is vital that the humanitarian and civilian nature of refugee camps not be compromised by the presence of armed elements and that refugees be able to exercise their right of voluntary return in security and dignity. Finally, in meeting the needs of refugees while protecting them, they must be counted and registered without delay. This is a primary, essential and inescapable obligation.

My delegation strongly condemns all attacks on humanitarian personnel and convoys and calls for their protection. We equally condemn the diversion by a number of armed groups of humanitarian assistance, which, rather than reaching the populations in need, serves to enrich the leaders of these groups, who must be held accountable by the international community as perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law.

As the Secretary-General underlines, the proliferation of non-State armed groups has exacerbated the difficulties involved in protecting civilians. When these groups violate international law, they must be brought to justice by the international community. In addition, humanitarian agencies must ensure that humanitarian work is not used by these groups for political ends.

My country urges the international community to confront the excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons, whose devastating effect on the civilian population has been clearly demonstrated. These arms often constitute a genuine threat to the peace and security of entire regions when they are trafficked and used by terrorist groups to attack innocent persons and threaten States and groups of States. In conclusion, I would like to state that, beyond United Nations actions to restore and build peace, preventive diplomacy and early warning systems remain important tools available to the Security Council for the peaceful settlement of disputes, the de-escalation of emerging crises and the prevention of the return of conflict. They should be used more often and systematically so as to have a palpable impact on hotbeds of tension throughout the world.