

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, August 19th, 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Sarki Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations.

On behalf of my delegation, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for the initiative you have taken to organize today's very important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for the concept note you have circulated to facilitate our discussions (S/2013/447, annex).

The efforts to build consensus on the subject and the progressive development of normative frameworks to address civilian protection challenges, including those in resolutions 1738 (2006) and 1894 (2009), are very encouraging developments.

We recognize the importance of the collective efforts of the various entities of the United Nations to ensure apposite protection for civilians from the terrors of conflict. We are all witnesses to the impact the United Nations and its partners have had in mitigating human suffering in conflict zones around the globe. The United Nations and regional and subregional organizations have also continued to play a vital preventive and mediation role in countries on the brink of conflict.

Despite those notable developments, the grim reality of today is that civilians still bear the brunt of conflict and are direct targets of abduction, sexual violence and the denial of humanitarian access. Recent developments have underscored the failure to comply with the law. We continue to encounter obstacles as we endeavour to address the five core challenges articulated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2012/376).

The assault on civilians, especially women and children, and the denial of humanitarian assistance in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and other conflict zones, illustrate the magnitude of the task of civilian protection. Difficult protection challenges also remain in Syria and Somalia, and the situation in Mali may present serious protection challenges, for which the international community must be prepared.

As stakeholders in international peace and security, our efforts should be directed at addressing constraints that militate against the effective protection of civilians. Protection for the civilian population is a basic element of humanitarian law. Civilians and all those not party to conflict must on no account be targeted deliberately and must be spared and protected. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols contain specific rules to that effect.

In order to rededicate ourselves to the moral undertaking to protect defenceless civilians in conflict situations, it is imperative that we deepen our commitment to bolster accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. It is time to put our words into action and adopt standardized measures to bring persistent perpetrators of violence against women and children to justice. In that connection, the Council should take the lead by adopting targeted measures against such perpetrators. On their part, States must not hesitate to take appropriate legal action against perpetrators of such heinous acts, following extensive investigations.

We must ensure that the export of arms and related weapons vis-à-vis by those perpetrators are henceforth regulated for probity, transparency and justice to innocent victims. The United Nations system has done a lot in that regard. The Firearms Protocol, the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, as well as the recently adopted Arms Trade Treaty, are veritable tools fashioned towards the achievement of

that objective. States must strengthen their resolve to ensure the appropriate implementation of those instruments.

As a major troop-contributing country, Nigeria is conscious of the efficacy of peacekeeping missions in the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict. To further enhance their effectiveness, it would be necessary to facilitate the implementation of their protection mandates.

I must stress that our growing understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of civilians in armed conflict must be marked by the ability and capacity to protect. Parties to conflict, as well as non-State actors, have a legal obligation to ensure compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law where the protection of civilians, including and in particular health providers, women and children, is the main focus. Parallel and equally important is the moral obligation we also have to prevent attacks against health-care facilities and providers; violence against women and children, especially sexual violence, which women and girls are subjected to; and other various forms of debasement that innocent civilians are subjected to in times of armed conflict.

Finally, it is important that we consolidate and ensure implementation of the existing normative framework on the protection of civilians, bearing in mind the challenges that I have enumerated. The international community should remain vigilant and bear its fair share of our collective responsibility to protect all civilians in situations of conflict. If we act purposefully and in concert we can certainly better shield civilians from the ravages of armed conflict.