

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security**  
**Tuesday, 26th October 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)**

***Statement by Ambassador Jose Moraes Cabral, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations***

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on an issue to which Portugal attaches the utmost importance. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2010/579), as well as Ms. Valerie Amos, Mr. Alain Le Roy, Ms. Navanethem Pillay and Mr. Yves Daccord for their very useful briefings.

We meet here today one year after the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009), which is rightly considered to be a benchmark of the United Nations normative system and the best reflection of the Security Council's long commitment to the issue of civilian protection in armed conflict. That resolution is also an essential development because it underlines the importance of addressing the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operation mandates in a proper way. The United Nations is now endowed with the necessary tools with which to act in an effective and accountable manner in protecting civilians in situations of armed conflict wherever they are called on to take action throughout the world.

The main responsibility to protect civilians lies obviously with States, but it is also clear that, in some cases, States need international support to carry out that responsibility. United Nations peacekeeping operations and United Nations missions, as well as United Nations agencies in general, are crucial to strengthening and helping national capacities to exercise that fundamental responsibility. We are aware that the very nature of armed conflicts has changed. Armed groups roam unchallenged within the borders of often vast countries, sowing violence and death, and avail themselves of the porosity of borders to further their criminal intentions. This new reality adds significantly to the complexity of the tasks of peacekeepers and strains their capacity to enforce compliance with international humanitarian law and uphold respect for fundamental human rights.

Despite all the difficulties, the protection of civilians — whether directly targeted or accidental victims of conflict — must be of paramount concern, and we strongly support the Secretary-General's recommendation for its enhancement. Civilians continue to account for the majority of conflict-related casualties and are constantly exposed and fall victim to serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law. It goes without saying that we acknowledge the huge scale and complexity of the task facing peacekeepers and United Nations agencies and missions. Nevertheless, we must strive to increase their effectiveness in protecting civilians in conflict situations.

Allow me to mention, in this context, what we believe to be three important issues: impunity and the lack of accountability, the need to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping operations and missions, and, finally, the need for an increasingly integrated approach to peacekeeping.

Portugal believes that the lack of accountability and the impunity that benefit many parties to armed conflict throughout the world are extremely disturbing. This situation obviously encourages perpetrators even as it discourages victims from denouncing violations and seeking redress. Furthermore, it renders the tasks of peacekeepers even more difficult in protecting civilians in situations of conflict. We believe that the United Nations and the Security Council must show their strong resolve as far as impunity is concerned, addressing ways and means by which its action can be more effective in bringing to justice those guilty of deliberately targeting civilians and violating their fundamental rights.

The report of the Secretary General points to some improvements that have been made in this regard through the actions of international institutions, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), and by national institutions. Concerning the ICC and its specific role in addressing the most serious crimes, we encourage every effort to strengthen the Court and to reinforce its credibility through enhanced cooperation among parties and the promotion of the universal ratification of the Rome Statute, especially now that the Kampala Review Conference successfully contributed to a larger international consensus around it through the agreement on the crime of aggression. Nevertheless, as the Secretary-General underlines, much more must still be done in this area. That will require, of course, a much more effective translation of rules and principles into applied actions on the ground by those rightfully entrusted to do so. It is clear that the normative framework we currently have is adequate; what seems often to be lacking is the political will to implement it effectively. My second point

concerns the need to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping operations and missions.

This requires clear, specific, situation- or country oriented mandates, as well as training and resources, so as to successfully fulfil our responsibilities to those who suffer the most. Allow me to stress training. If they are to carry out their tasks in an efficient way, peacekeepers should be well acquainted with the origins and reasons underlying a conflict as well as the social, economic, ethnic and cultural patterns of the country in which they serve. Recent experiences show the importance and usefulness of engaging with local communities and benefiting from their wealth of knowledge of specific situations and conditions, as well as the extent to which such engagement can reinforce the sense of ownership by the people. One must also bear in mind, however, that those communities might be singled out as objects of reprisal by warring factions, and act accordingly.

Finally, the growing complexity and diversity of mission-mandated tasks demand an integrated approach to United Nations peacekeeping. There is a growing understanding of the concept of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, and in this sense the guidance given to United Nations missions on how to effectively protect civilians is particularly important. We commend the work that has been conducted within the United Nations towards achieving a shared understanding of this concept and developing a strategic framework for mission-wide strategies on the protection of civilians. Training modules and the identification of resources and capacities required to perform the tasks are also of the utmost importance, as are scenario-based exercises for senior mission leadership, as described in the progress report on the New Horizon initiative. However, if missions are to perform efficiently, adequate capacities have to be deployed on the ground, with clearly defined and achievable tasks and objectives, so as to avoid capability gaps that would hamper missions. To conclude, let me assure the Council that Portugal will stay fully committed and actively engaged in all efforts pertaining to strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. We look forward to working closely with members of the Council on this endeavour from the outset of our tenure next January.