

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. Sergey Karev, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations

We are grateful to Under-Secretaries-General Amos and Le Roy, to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Pillay, and to Mr. Daccord, Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their briefings.

The Russian Federation favours the peaceful resolution of disputes. However, despite all the international community's efforts, armed conflicts happen and claim the lives of many people, the majority of whom are civilians. They especially need our protection. We are speaking, first and foremost, of children, women and the elderly, and the humanitarian personnel who help them. We are convinced that correcting this situation demands strict compliance with the norms of international humanitarian law and human rights standards and implementation of relevant Security Council decisions.

We firmly condemn both premeditated attacks on civilians and their death as the result of the indiscriminate or disproportionate use of force, which is a flagrant violation of international human law. There is no justification for armed groups who attack peaceful populations, commit terrorist acts and take hostages. We emphasize the responsibility of all parties to a conflict to ensure the security of civilians and to comply strictly with the norms of international humanitarian law. We advocate the thorough investigation of such incidents and punishment of the perpetrators.

That also applies to the activities of private military and security companies, the victims of whose actions are often entirely innocent people. In the context of formulating clear international standards, we welcome the recent decision to establish, within the framework of the Human Rights Council, an open-ended working group to prepare a draft of a legally binding document on the activities of such companies. We are pleased that those topics are reflected in the text of today's presidential statement (S/PRST/2010/25).

The protection of peaceful populations is a high priority task for the Governments of States involved in conflict. All parties to armed conflicts bear the responsibility for ensuring the security of civilians. The actions of the international community should be aimed at assisting national efforts in that area. Taking appropriate measures, particularly those involving the use of force, is possible only with the approval of the Security Council and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, it is important to take into account the economic, social, historical, religious, cultural and other specifics of countries and regions, as well as the nature of each conflict, its underlying causes and the possibilities for settlement.

There is no doubt of the need for the Security Council to draw up clear and realistic mandates for the protection of civilians, taking into account the financial and logistical resources at the disposal of United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as the leadership in this area, on the basis of consultations with Member States.

We should not forget, however, that the protection of civilians is only one element in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. The main task of United Nations peacekeeping is to facilitate the peace process. One very important aspect of the protection of civilians is the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. Those programmes require adequate support from United Nations peacekeeping missions.

The work of humanitarian agencies is an important factor. It should be based on the norms of the United Nations Charter and basic humanitarian principles, while their effectiveness depends largely on how they fit into the international community's efforts for political settlements. In that context, respect for State sovereignty is a fundamental principle.