

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 12th February, 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Eler, Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations

I would like to thank the Lithuanian presidency for organizing this important debate.

The framework for the protection of civilians has increasingly advanced since the human tragedies of the Rwanda and Srebrenica genocides. The need to protect and assist civilians affected by armed conflict has been stressed in numerous Security Council resolutions since 1999. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689), the recommendations made by the Internal Review Panel on the United Nations Action in Sri Lanka, and the agenda entitled “Rights up front” have been the latest examples that have contributed to the elaboration of a conceptual and normative framework related to the protection of civilians. It is now time to look into how to translate that into practice.

However, the civilian death toll continues to rise, with recent alarming signals coming from Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, among many other places. The Secretary-General’s report points out a multitude of challenges in Syria, ranging from attacks on civilians and civilian deaths to displacement, a lack and arbitrary denial of humanitarian access, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the indiscriminate use of heavy weapons and aerial bombardments, summary and extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and attacks on schools, hospitals and other public facilities, among many others.

The role of peacekeeping and other missions in the protection of civilians in conflict is essential. It is high time to start developing coherent and effective general strategies in order to respond to the ever-worsening situation of civilians in armed conflict. Those strategies should also respond to the changing international context and the new realities on the ground.

States have the primary responsibility for protecting their civilians. Parties to conflict must uphold humanitarian and human rights principles and comply with their international humanitarian and human rights obligations, ensure accountability and provide the necessary support and services to those who are suffering or have suffered in situations of conflict. The United Nations and the international community must assist them in this burdensome task, supporting them in terms of capacity-building and the provision of available resources in times of need, upon request, and taking the necessary measures when the actors primarily responsible fail to do so.

Monitoring and reporting are among the most important contributions that peacekeeping and other missions can provide, especially in field missions where accessibility is a problem. United Nations and other missions can be crucial sources of trustworthy information, which can lead to awareness-raising as well as to better planning, protection and response. That increases the importance of objective, consistent and responsible reporting. From this perspective, we also fully support fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry, and we believe that we should be able to make better use of their findings. To that end, States should provide full access to mandated missions to observe and report.

Furthermore, the United Nations, its missions and its agencies could play a valuable coordinating role among the many actors involved, which could contribute towards realizing protection-of-civilians mandates. For United Nations missions and peacekeeping operations to achieve those goals, it is essential that they be provided with necessary support, equipment and resources. Disadvantaged categories of the population, such as women, children, people with disabilities and older persons, should be given special attention in the process of the design of protection-of-civilians mandates and strategies, as well as in the training programmes of military, police and civilian personnel. The prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, as well as the provision of services to those suffering from such violence, should be a particular area of focus.

There is a compelling need, in working on such strategies, to listen more attentively to regional countries and organizations, troop-contributing countries and other relevant actors that are active in crisis areas. The Secretary-General's report (S/2013/689) highlights the comprehensive and cross-cutting nature of efforts relating to the protection of civilians and the importance of bringing together different actors towards that end. Mediation and other conflict-prevention mechanisms should be utilized to the fullest extent. As such, we welcome the relevant part of the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) prepared by the Lithuanian presidency, which emphasizes the need to consult a broad range of actors in the implementation of civilian-protection tasks and beyond.

For protection-of-civilians mandates to be fully realized, the strong support of the international community is essential. The Syrian crisis, which is resulting in the loss of thousands of civilian lives before our very eyes, is a sad and striking reminder of the importance of unity and immediate joint action.

In concluding, I would like to stress our appreciation to the hardworking personnel of the United Nations, whose courageous and tireless efforts help prevent the loss of the lives of thousands of civilians around the globe every day.