

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

Statement by Mr. Nduhura, Permanent Mission of Uganda to the United Nations

I congratulate you, Madam President, and the delegation of Lithuania on your leadership of the Security Council this month. I also thank you for organizing and presiding over this debate on this very crucial topic. We thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross Yves Daccord for their insightful briefings.

In contemporary armed conflicts, innocent civilians often constitute an overwhelming majority of victims and have at times been deliberately targeted. The most vulnerable populations at risk include women and children, who are often killed, raped and sexually abused or forced to become soldiers. Survivors are often displaced, taking refuge in camps where they are often defenceless against armed attacks and harassment.

My delegation would like to underscore the importance of protecting civilians in armed conflict. We would like therefore to commend the Security Council for its continuous prioritization of its engagement on this role. I wish to emphasize the following fundamental points in the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, it is essential to ensure a quick, effective and concerted response, especially in situations of armed conflict, in order to protect civilians, prevent atrocities, restore law and order and provide humanitarian assistance. Today's armed conflicts often take place in densely populated areas, with extensive civilian losses and damage to civilian buildings and infrastructure as a result. That means there is an urgent need to consider whether the interpretation of the basic international humanitarian law rules of distinction between military targets and civilians and proportionality need to be further strengthened.

We have unfortunately witnessed many instances on the African continent where delayed action by State authorities, the region or the Security Council have resulted in a devastating loss of life and untold suffering to populations. The African Union is working towards the operationalization of African standby brigades to be able to respond quickly and robustly in situations of violent conflict. In that regard, we look forward to support from the international community.

Secondly, there is a need to emphasize the importance of mediation as a recourse in the peaceful settlement of conflicts, even after the outbreak of conflict. As we know, protection broadly encompasses activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with international law, a task that is difficult in armed conflicts. We underscore the need for the parties to a conflict to seek political solutions through dialogue, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement or the use of regional and international arrangements in accordance with Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations.

We call upon the Security Council to give top priority to conflict prevention and mediation under Chapter VI of the Charter. For example, Uganda's role as mediator of the dialogue between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Mouvement du 23 mars under the auspices of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region de-escalated the conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and saved lives. My delegation is convinced that exerting greater efforts to peacefully resolve disputes will reduce threats to peace and security. From that perspective, greater use of mediation should be a part of the Council's overall response to the increased magnitude and complexity of peacekeeping as conflicts become more multi-layered.

Thirdly, there is a need to enhance early-warning and response mechanisms in the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The United Nations has improved its operational innovations in civilian

protection, which include practical steps and guidance on civilian protection as well as highlighting best practices. However, there is still more work to be done to ensure the protection of civilians on the ground, with a focus on preventive mechanisms to deter damage, destruction and loss of life as a result of armed conflict.

In conclusion, my delegation calls for regular interaction, coordination and consultation among the Security Council, regional and subregional organizations and host States, with a view to devising more effective strategies for protecting civilians in armed conflict. Since regional organizations have a comparative advantage through increased complementarities to undertake efforts to ensure protection of civilians in armed conflict, the benefits of such coordination are enormous.