

Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians During Armed Conflict
Monday, 22nd November 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, Vice-President of Sudan

At the outset, I should like to associate my delegation with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. Eleven years have passed since the Secretary-General submitted to the Security Council his first report (S/1999/957) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We continue to have high hopes that the Council's ongoing deliberations on this issue will lead to a comprehensive approach and far-reaching objective vision on the best means to protect civilians. My delegation believes that first and foremost in that effort should be the elimination of the root causes of armed conflict. Avoiding the causes of conflict and supporting lasting and comprehensive political settlements are the best guarantees for ensuring the protection of civilians. Protection is always more effective than the cure.

The recommendations of the Secretary-General in his various reports on this issue have focused on the need to reactivate and improve the capacities of United Nations peacekeeping operations with regard to the protection of civilians. However, realities on the ground and practical experience in many countries have clearly confirmed that, in the absence of any peace to be kept, peacekeeping missions will not achieve the desired goal, regardless of the level of their capacity to protect.

The enjoyment of peace by all is what primarily protects civilians. That includes the speedy implementation of development, economic recovery and reconstruction programmes, as well as programmes for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the provision of services and quick-impact projects to ensure stability and the speedy resettlement of returnees. Peace also guarantees that civilians can leave refugee camps and return to their homes to resume ordinary lives.

Against that backdrop, peacebuilding must be the primary priority and concern of the United Nations, which should not be distracted from it by dealing with other symptoms of conflict. Moreover, I wish to reiterate that we must take advantage of regional organizations with proven ability and capacity to build and maintain peace, given their direct link to the causes of conflicts and their comprehensive understanding of them. In that regard, I would also like to point to the decisions taken at the meeting organized by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Dakar in April 2007 on the role of regional organizations in the protection of civilians and on peacebuilding overall.

The principle of protecting civilians in armed conflict is a noble one to which we all aspire. However, we are concerned by attempts by some countries to utilize that goal to serve particular political aims, such as the ongoing campaign on the so-called responsibility to protect. In that regard, I would like to reiterate that, although referred to in the 2005 Summit Outcome, the responsibility to protect is still the subject of divergent interpretations on the part of Member States. In that connection, we must bear in mind the established principles of the Charter of the United Nations vis-à-vis the sovereignty and legitimacy of Member States and their full responsibility for the protection of their citizens.

I would also like to note that the right to protect civilians in armed conflict is but one aspect of an integrated and interconnected system of rights and duties, as reaffirmed by the 2005 Summit Outcome. The main thrust of the Summit was to follow-up the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, foremost among which are development, combating poverty and preventing conflicts by dealing with their root causes. The protection of civilians must therefore take place in the context of a comprehensive and integrated approach that is primarily focused on dealing with the root causes to conflict from the earliest stages, with the Security Council playing an active role in leading and supporting efforts at political mediation, reconciliation and compromise. That should be complemented by a parallel role for the United Nations Secretariat and its agencies vis-à-vis humanitarian considerations and promoting economic growth, recovery and sustainable development. In particular, donors should honour their development pledges.

Ultimately, the protection of civilians is the responsibility of individual States themselves. Therefore, we should improve the capacities of the concerned States so that they can assume their responsibilities ably, rather than

weaken those capacities through sanctions, despite the fact that those who support sanctions try to portray them as either smart or targeted or by using other evasive descriptions. None of those descriptions alter the reality that sanctions cause undeniable harm to the ordinary people of the country targeted.

In its section II, the report of the SecretaryGeneral mentions attacks on humanitarian workers in Darfur, including incidents of kidnapping, robbery and the looting of assets and mobile units. While we share the Security Council's concern over this phenomenon, we would also like to draw members' attention to the fact that the perpetrators of such attacks are most likely members of armed rebel movements and gangs of thieves and bandits affiliated with the rebels, or of a number of groups that are offshoots of the armed rebel movements, which carry out these robberies and attacks in order to fund and provision their members and to destabilize the situation throughout Darfur in order to send a deceptive message to the international community, as is currently the case.

We believe that the personnel of humanitarian agencies and organizations have a primary responsibility to coordinate with local authorities before going to any areas to which they want to deliver aid so that the Government can offer them the necessary protection. We have recently noticed that many humanitarian workers do not abide by safety procedures or coordinate with the authorities, making them vulnerable to such attacks. Allow me to provide two striking examples of this. Humanitarian workers in Darfur have agreed with us to abide by three rules, one of which is to put insufficient fuel in their vehicles so that car thieves cannot drive them to distant locations. However, humanitarian workers have not followed this advice. That is the first example. Another point that we agreed upon was that they would lock their vehicles when they parked them, but they continue not to do so, which has encouraged many rebels to take advantage of their lax behaviour. These workers are often the personnel of United Nations agencies. Therefore, we want to reaffirm the need to abide by safety measures and to coordinate with the authorities, which would greatly reduce the robberies and attacks against vehicles and minimize the kidnapping of humanitarian workers.

In closing, we confirm the need to adopt a comprehensive approach that would deal primarily, without selectivity or discrimination, with the root causes of conflicts in addressing the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also affirm the need for the Security Council to demonstrate in practical terms the extent of its support for the protection of civilians in armed conflict by supporting comprehensive political settlements of conflicts. The Security Council must support all mediation efforts in order to resolve conflicts and address their root causes and motives.