

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. Ertugrul Apakan, Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations

At the outset, I wish to thank today's briefers for their comprehensive presentations.

Turkey welcomes the Council's increased attention to protection issues, including its adoption last November of resolution 1894 (2009), which was a significant step in this area. We also attach importance to recently adopted resolutions on women and peace and security and children and armed conflict.

There is no doubt that the primary obligation to protect civilians lies with States. However, the international community also has a shared responsibility to help to protect civilians in situations where States fail to do so. We therefore need to build collective awareness of the importance of that responsibility. We must also be able to agree on fundamental guidelines. The updated aide-memoire, which has been adopted today, provides a useful guide for improved analysis of key protection issues.

As mentioned in the report (S/2010/579) of the Secretary-General, while in the course of the past 11 years a comprehensive framework has been established, the emphasis must now be on making progress in enhancing protection on the ground. We must therefore translate our legal commitments into actions. The real problem lies with implementation, rather than norm-setting.

A case in point is Gaza, where tragic developments have taken place and civilians continue to suffer. In that regard, we will also follow up the inquiry process, both in Geneva and New York, on the Israeli attack against the humanitarian aid convoy to Gaza, which took place in international waters and resulted in nine civilian deaths and many wounded.

The protection of civilians during peacekeeping operations is one of the key challenges before us. Turkey attaches importance to incorporating that task in peacekeeping mandates, including effectively implementing it. Regional ownership and cooperation are also worth mentioning. Moreover, it is important to improve pre-deployment training on the protection of civilians for peacekeeping personnel, including taking into consideration cultural differences and sensitivities.

In some situations, civilians become victims in spite of the fact that parties fully comply with applicable law. Turkey calls upon parties to armed conflicts to make amends to the civilians they harm, with a view to respecting their inherent dignity as human beings.

Let me underline two issues. The first relates to dialogue with non-State armed groups. We understand the rationale of humanitarian access to civilians. However, Turkey believes that in doing so we should be extremely careful not to extend any sense of legitimacy to such organizations. Some terrorist groups in various parts of the world attempt to exploit such a humanitarian approach to gain international acceptance and recognition.

My second point is that we should make a clear distinction between the counter-terrorism efforts of law enforcement agencies and armed conflict. We strongly condemn all acts of terrorism. As indicated in the Council's presidential statement (S/PRST/2010/19) of 27 September, terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to the enjoyment of human rights and to social and economic development. It also undermines global stability and prosperity. Governments therefore not only have the legitimate right but also the obligation to effectively combat terrorism and fully and effectively cooperate with other States.

The issue of protecting civilians in armed conflict is a cause that the international community must pursue with unwavering determination. We believe that, in order to ensure long-term and lasting protection of civilians, human rights, the rule of law, democracy and good governance should be strengthened. We should also ensure that perpetrators of violence against civilians are held fully accountable for their actions. Sustainable prevention and protection will only be possible if there is no impunity.