

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 17th 2013,
Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ms. Rice, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States. I thank Deputy Secretary--General Eliasson for his briefing and for his support for this issue. We also greatly appreciate the remarks of our four briefers, who have made a compelling case for the challenges and risks that journalists face. Their experiences demonstrate the indispensable role that journalists play in focusing the world's attention on conflict. That is why the United States has convened today's open debate on protecting journalists.

Journalists are literally our eyes and ears in every corner of the world. They sound the warning when local tensions threaten to erupt into war. They document the suffering of civilians in conflict areas. And they expose human rights violations and war crimes. Journalists are critical to the Security Council's ability to remain well informed so that it may fulfil its mandate to maintain international peace and security.

Reporting from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s brought attention to mass atrocities there and helped to mobilize the response of the international community, including support for a war crimes tribunal. More recently, the Council relied on videos, photos and the reported accounts of citizens to understand the events taking place in Libya in 2011. That real--time reporting gave us the information necessary to act quickly to prevent even more horrific violence by the Al--Qadhafi regime.

Tragically, this work is not without sacrifice, as the case of journalist Mohamed Nabbous and his wife Samra Naas demonstrated. When a sniper killed Mo while he was broadcasting live during Al--Qadhafi's assault on Benghazi, Samra, pregnant with their first child, took his place, declaring "What he has started has got to go on, no matter what happens."

In Syria, the Al--Assad regime continues to kill, imprison and torture journalists. Mazen Darwish, head of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, the only Syria--based non--governmental organization accredited to the United Nations, has been held incommunicado since February 2012, and was reported to have been tortured by the Al--Assad regime. His so--called crime, like so many of his colleagues, was to exercise his universal right to freedom of expression to show the world the regime's atrocities.

As others have noted, resolution 1738 (2006) reminds us that journalists operating in armed conflict are protected under international humanitarian law. Given the invaluable contribution of journalists to our work, the Council must do all it can to ensure their protection. Therefore, we ask the Secretary-- General to increase his focus on the safety and security of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in his reports on the protection of civilians and in his reports on peacekeeping missions whose mandates include civilian protection.

Furthermore, we urge Member States, especially those that contribute troops and police to United Nations peacekeeping missions, to ensure that their judicial officials, law enforcement officers and military personnel know their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law as regards the safety of journalists.

Impunity for violence against journalists must end. The United States endorses fully the 2012 United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. We encourage Member States to enact its provisions and put in place voluntary protection programmes for

journalists operating in conflict areas.

We also underscore the specific risks faced by women journalists, including sexual and gender-based violence. A gender-sensitive approach is needed when considering measures to address the safety of journalists.

New and emerging forms of twenty-first century communication technologies, including various Internet forums, blogging, texting and other social media platforms, have transformed the way journalists, including citizen journalists, work. Those new forms of communication have allowed wider and more rapid dissemination of information from conflicts across the globe. We call on all Member States to maintain and safeguard the infrastructure that enables the work of journalists in situations of conflict.

In conclusion, recognizing the value of the work of journalists reporting on conflict, the Council has an obligation to help protect those who provide us with so much vital information. We thank journalists around the world who risk their lives to seek the truth and shine light on the darkness for the entire world to see. The Security Council could not do its job without them.