

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

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Rosemary DiCarlo, Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs of the United States to the United Nations

Let me thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate and for your leadership on the presidential statement that we adopted today (S/PRST/2010/25). Let me also thank Under-Secretaries-General Amos and Le Roy, High Commissioner Pillay and the Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Daccord, for their valuable briefings and their dedication to protecting civilians.

Today we commend the work of the United Nations and the hundreds of thousands of brave peacekeepers and humanitarian workers who put their lives at risk to protect civilians living in harm's way. We recognize the importance of the collective efforts by the political, peacekeeping, human rights, humanitarian and development components of the United Nations to ensure proper protection from the horrors of war. We have seen the impact the United Nations and its partners have made in such places as Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Timor-Leste and other countries shaken by armed conflict. The United Nations and regional organization partners have also played an important preventive and mediation role in countries such as Guinea and Kenya.

The progress of the United Nations is the result of years of hard work at Headquarters and in the field. Resolution 1894 (2009) was a landmark in the global effort to better protect civilians in conflict zones. So, too, is this year's report from the General Assembly's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/64/19). Both documents called for mission-wide planning, better predeployment training and stronger protection strategies. We applaud the Organization's recent development of mission-wide protection strategies in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. We urge that those strategies be implemented, and we look forward to the expansion of similar approaches to other United Nations missions.

Despite those notable achievements, we are still reminded every day of how far we have to go. We are deeply concerned by the trends outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2010/579), especially the seemingly ceaseless unlawful targeting of civilians, including women, children, humanitarian workers and journalists. Children are still being forcibly recruited to become soldiers. Women and girls in particular face constant threats of rape and sexual abuse, and the number of refugees and internally displaced persons has only grown larger since last year.

All too often humanitarian workers themselves are the targets of attack by warring parties and terrorists. Such intimidation and violence is appalling and unacceptable. While eight United Nations peacekeeping missions are now mandated to protect civilians from physical violence, many civilians suffer not only from indiscriminate attacks but from attacks directed at them deliberately. The United States calls for more concrete actions to hold accountable those who attack humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel.

We must also pursue accountability in places where insurgents and terrorists hide among civilian populations and turn communities into battlefields. Those groups continue to inflict unspeakable crimes on innocents. In some cases, they actively use religious establishments, hospitals and neighbourhoods to launch rocket and mortar attacks and compromise the protection of civilians in such areas.

The United States hopes that we can work together towards improvements in four key areas.

First, we must continue our efforts to better tailor peacekeeping mandates to adequately address situation-specific challenges on the ground. That includes laying out a clear hierarchy of tasks so that peacekeepers can understand the priorities. The Secretary-General's report notes the progress that the Council has made in mandating civilian protection in peacekeeping missions. Nevertheless, better planning, preparedness and policies are needed to support the missions' efforts to reduce the vulnerabilities of innocents in conflict zones.

Secondly, we should increase our ability to provide peacekeepers and humanitarian organizations with the knowledge, training and resources needed to fulfill their protection mandates, including protection against sexual and gender-based violence. Many peacekeeping missions and humanitarian organizations struggle due to

inadequate resources and insufficient communication with local communities. The United States is proud to play a leading role in developing peacekeeping capacity, particularly with regard to military and police programmes.

Thirdly, we must ensure that the Council is not being selective in its application of protection principles. We are encouraged by the work of the informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians. We call for its focus to expand to consider crosscutting protection concerns and to monitor progress on the benchmarks and indicators being developed by the Secretary-General. We also welcome the updated aide mémoire of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which will be useful in Council discussions.

Fourthly, we must hold accountable groups and individuals that flagrantly violate the laws of war, including those who use rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war. The primary responsibility for ensuring accountability lies with States, but the international community must be prepared to take action against those who violate international humanitarian law, including through the imposition of sanctions, such as the freezing of assets, the banning of international travel or restricting the flow of goods and arms. We must help Governments create, maintain and operate credible national courts, where possible, and support international and hybrid tribunals, when necessary, to end impunity. The International Criminal Court plays a key role in bringing perpetrators of the worst atrocities to justice.

We understand far better than we did a decade ago what protecting civilians in armed conflict truly entails. We are developing more tools and mechanisms to implement lessons that have been painfully learned. We must remain vigilant and address future challenges together more consistently. We still have far more to do to save the lives of civilians in conflict zones. The situations differ from conflict to conflict, but all civilian victims are innocent and they should all be sheltered by the rule of law and the rules of war.