

## Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

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*Statement by Mr. Valero Briceño, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations*

The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians of 3 May 2011 identifies some contentious issues that have emerged during discussions at the United Nations. Is military force the best way to protect civilians? Does the Security Council truly resort to the use of force only as a last resort to protect civilians? Has the Security Council acted selectively when choosing which civilians deserve protection and which do not?

These issues must be discussed in the United Nations, where some are using the noble purpose of protecting civilians as a pretext to occupy sovereign countries and promote national interests. Humanitarian reasons are invoked while war crimes are committed. Civilians are being killed, including women and children, allegedly in the defence of civilians.

The boundless avarice and neo-colonialist ambition of some countries are the greatest threats to civilians, human life and nature in the world. Venezuela stresses the need to address the broader root causes of conflict, including inequality, poverty, unemployment and domination by a foreign power, which would make it possible to contribute to the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts and the genuine protection of civilians.

Venezuela has consistently condemned attacks against civilians, regardless of the perpetrator. Attacks on civilians and civilian targets are banned under international law; however, indiscriminate attacks using missiles and bombs are being launched on Libyan territory, killing civilians and even troops of the opposition forces, in places that have no connection with the no-fly zone or the protection of civilians.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela condemns the killing of the son of leader Muammar Al-Qadhafi, Saif Al-Arab Muammar Al-Qadhafi, and three of his grandchildren, the victims of one of the bombings that day after day massacre civilians in that sister African nation. The Bolivarian Government demands that the United Nations condemn such illegal acts.

The Fourth Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute define as war crimes the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force; attacks against civilians, regardless of their perpetrator; and the imposition of collective punishment.

It is deplorable that some of the countries members of the Security Council should provide weapons and military advice and be part of the military structure of the opposition to the Government of Muammar Al-Qadhafi, when they should, as members of this body, maintain impartiality in an internal conflict, one that the Libyan people must resolve independently.

It is deplorable that NATO forces are acting as an army in the service of an insurgent group against the Government of Libya, thereby detracting from the humanitarian character of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

It is regrettable that certain countries are seeking regime change in Libya, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Those actions contravene resolution 1973 (2011), which calls for respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Libya.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela calls for the creation of independent and impartial international mechanisms for monitoring a ceasefire and promoting a dialogue between the parties as well as a peaceful solution to the conflict that would preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Libya.

The Security Council not infrequently acts selectively when deciding which civilians deserve protection, and it also implements sanctions regimes in a biased fashion so as to punish Governments of developing countries.

How is it that Israel has not been sanctioned for its massive violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people? Why have the massacres of innocent civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan not been condemned?

Venezuela believes that powerful countries are manipulating the concept of the responsibility to protect, when they are seeking solely to impose their strategic interests on the world. The responsibility for protecting civilians lies solely with States. The assistance that the international community can offer in this regard should be in support of national efforts at the request of the State concerned.

Venezuela believes that in situations of internal conflict, diplomacy and dialogue are the only means of protecting civilians. It is of great concern, therefore, that the Security Council, instead of promoting peace and security throughout the world, could become a mechanism for war.