

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

Statement by Jorge Valero Briceño, Permanent Representative for Venezuela to the United Nations

Allow me to express on behalf of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela our gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this debate. My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

No one can dispute the need to protect all vulnerable civilians from the effects of armed conflict, pursuant to the relevant instruments of international law, international humanitarian law and, in particular, the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Those instruments should be applied equally to all cases involving threatened civilian populations, ensuring full transparency in the application of the law and eliminating the ongoing impunity of those States whose aggressions against unprotected civilian populations have been condoned for too long.

The protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations is one of many tasks established in Security Council mandates. It is related to other equally important tasks and its implementation is viable only within the regulatory framework that sets out the guiding principles for such operations: the consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force. The protection of civilians cannot be conducted outside the political and legal bases accepted by States. A successful strategy for the protection of civilians demands that the root causes of conflict be systematically addressed through actions that have a positive impact on development and using appropriate channels for the peaceful resolution of disputes. As established in international law, States or parties to a conflict have the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Peacekeeping operations are in certain limited cases assigned the task of protecting physical well-being in situations of imminent danger to life, always within the ground deployment of a mission and when required to facilitate humanitarian aid.

We note the significant risks inherent in any initiative that seeks to operationalize the protection of civilians, especially in the light of the coexistence of divergent, mutually exclusive conceptual approaches to the problem and of the individual nature of each armed conflict. In this context, the issue of civilian protection forces us to reiterate the questions formulated in 2005 by President Hugo Chávez during the discussions on the responsibility to protect, which have yet to be answered. Who defines — and how — what is necessary to protect civilians? What is the body responsible for identifying the potential players — “spoilers” — threatening the fulfilment of the mandate? Finally, what risks do these issues present for the impartiality of a peacekeeping mission? It is necessary for the Member States to deliberate these issues in the General Assembly as a basic prerequisite for progress in the formulation of policies that bring about genuine and broad consensus.