

Mr. Donoghue (Ireland): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union. We would like to provide the following remarks in a national capacity.

Ireland began participating in United Nations peace operations in 1958, three years after becoming a State Member of the United Nations. The nature of international conflict has changed considerably since then. We have today deliberate attacks on civilians and on their hospitals and schools. We have the proliferation of non-State armed groups and their asymmetric tactics. We have blatant disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law, along with a culture of impunity.

The three high-level reviews of last year pointed to ways to address these issues. First, mandate design must be improved and the needs of civilians must be placed at the centre. No two conflicts are the same; it follows therefore that no two mandates should be identical. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case in United Nations peace operations. We have, too many times, followed a template-style format when designing mission mandates rather than asking the difficult questions: What are the specific needs of this country? Of this conflict? Of these people? And how can we help to meet these needs? While 10 out of 16 peace operations now have protection of civilian mandates, the aim to protect civilians is the intrinsic reason any mission exists. The protection of civilians must be at the heart of the planning process, with more proactive and robust political, civilian and military interventions for protection allowed for throughout all missions.

Secondly, our peacekeeping and protection efforts must be grounded in respect for international law. Peace missions are often deployed in situations where there has been an almost complete break-down in the rule of law. At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Ireland made a specific commitment to ensure that our personnel deployed on overseas peacekeeping missions operate at the highest standards in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. We also committed to ensuring accountability for any failure that would amount to a crime under international law, and we are pleased to be among the growing list of Member States that have endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

While it is important to advance and propagate international frameworks for the protection of civilians, we need to ensure that this is felt on the ground. Next week, the United Nations Training School Ireland will host training for both national and international students on the protection of civilians. Now in its second year, this Irish Defence Forces initiative allows participants to share best practices from the ground, while delivering valuable training, including in the area of international human rights law.

Furthermore, we cannot allow impunity for violations of some of the most basic tenets of international law in the area of the protection of civilians. Tackling the issue demands a comprehensive approach to capacity-building from Member States and the international and regional system alike.

Thirdly, the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda is a valuable tool to advance the protection of civilians. Resolution 1325 (2000) was a milestone for the Council. It acknowledged that women and girls face specific risks in conflict settings, which require specific actions for protection. Ireland works to mainstream gender throughout military operations by appointing gender advisers in each brigade and formation, and we have prioritized diversity in our Defence Forces' recently launched recruitment drive.

The first workshop of gender advisers from across regional organizations, which Ireland hosted this month, is another firm step towards ensuring the participation of women in peacekeeping. Furthermore, Ireland is resolute in its belief that the heinous crime of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers can be fully stamped out, including by strengthened pre deployment and ongoing professional training programmes.

I conclude on a potentially paradoxical note. Ireland believes that every discussion of peacekeeping operations should include the following question: How can we prevent the deployment of those operations in the first instance? A successful whole-of-United Nations approach to peace building and conflict prevention will require embedding in peace operations the objective of tackling the root causes of their deployment.