

**Ms. Murmokaitė** (Lithuania): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organizing this important debate. Lithuania aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

Today's debate is a reminder once again that an ample knowledge base exists on what is needed to improve the protection of civilian populations by peacekeeping missions, including as reflected in the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) and last year's reviews on peacebuilding and women and peace and security.

As noted by many delegations today, clear, credible and achievable mandates matched by the reliable and readily availability of the necessary materiel, equipment and critical enablers; strong mission leadership and personal responsibility; the pre-deployment training of troops, including on the protection of civilians; inclusion of thematic advisers on women, children and the protection of civilians in peacekeeping missions; a more robust, proactive protection posture; and the existence of specific protection-of-civilians strategies for each peacekeeping mission with a protection mandate all play an important role in the protection of civilians.

Furthermore, information obtained through modern technologies can greatly enhance a mission's situational awareness and intelligence-led decision-making. It provides advance warning of armed groups' movements and imminent attacks, thus enabling a faster response and pre-emptive action, which in turn helps to save civilian lives as well as the lives of peacekeepers themselves.

Against the backdrop of this extensive knowledge base and our experience on the ground, we believe that a sharper focus is needed on how existing norms are translated into more effective protection. Obstacles may vary, including a weak chain of command; lack of air lifts or capacity or fuel shortages that immobilize patrolling vehicles; insufficient support for human rights units; some 200 peacekeepers being sick with malaria at any given time, as was the case in the Central African Republic; protracted staff shortages; and lack of analytical or intelligence capacity within a mission. As a consequence, even the best resolutions and recommendations will be no worth no more than the paper they are written on if implementation falters for these various reasons.

The hurdles that missions face as well as good practices and the dissemination of lessons learned should be given greater attention in the Council's deliberations. Real interactive dialogues with force and police commanders, going well beyond once-a-year formal meetings, would facilitate the removal of existing obstacles and a better understanding the situation on the ground.

The protection of civilians, a difficult task in itself, will be even more complex without the buy-in of local authorities and populations. The effective protection of civilians and, for that matter, the safety of peacekeepers themselves depend also on close ties with and the trust of local communities, including women, youth and marginalized groups. Such trust-based relations provide peacekeepers with much-needed local intelligence, enable a better understanding of the specific vulnerabilities and needs of local communities and facilitate the crafting of specific, targeted and effective responses to the threats such communities face.

Nothing breaches this trust more than abuses perpetrated by peacekeepers themselves. Protectors turned into predators tarnish the good name of the thousands and thousands of United Nations peacekeepers who have served with dedication and, increasingly, at a risk to their own lives, including those who have paid the ultimate price for protecting others.

Those guilty of abuses should not be allowed to hide behind national jurisdictions to avoid justice. The onus is on the troop-contributing countries to bring the perpetrators to account.

We welcome the Secretary-General's strong response to the latest sexual exploitation and abuse scandal concerning the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the concrete steps that have been taken to tackle the problem. The Council should also do its utmost to put an end to impunity. In this respect, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2272 (2016) in March this year and call for its full implementation.

At the same time, let us not forget that this particular ill is not new. The first widely publicized sexual exploitation and abuse cases date back to 1992, in Cambodia, and others followed. In March 2005, a comprehensive strategy to eliminate future sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping operations was released, and yet here we are again. What use are reports if they are not implemented? We have to make sure that our attention span lasts well beyond the occurrence of a specific incident, and that reports and recommendations are put into action in a consistent and comprehensive manner. That is the only way we can ensure that 10 or 15 years from now United Nations peacekeeping will not go through yet another cycle of scandal and shame.