

Mr. Yacoubou (Niger) (*spoke in French*) I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council on behalf of your country for the month of June 2016. I also wish to welcome, once again, the presence of the President of the Central African Republic at this important meeting. I would also like to congratulate you, Sir, for organizing this debate, a particularly important one for our Organization and for States such as mine, the Niger.

Indeed, as you know, the Niger is a country resolutely committed to peacekeeping operations through our significant contribution of civilian, military and police components. To date, we have more than 1,820 men and women serving in those operations, making our country, the Niger, the 17th global contributor in that regard. The Niger has firmly adhered to the principles of Kigali, which we consider to be relevant and appropriate. With regard to the specific topic of our meeting today, namely, the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations, we believe that it is essential to make a few observations.

The first is that the nature of conflict has evolved considerably to the point that most conflicts are not inter-State wars involving regular armies in which the men and women involved are conventional soldiers known and recognized as part of a regular army and identifiable by their uniform or their units. Instead, conventional armies are pitted against terrorist groups that operate outside of laws and conventions, recruit civilians to arms and make no distinction among those they target.

Our challenge as democratic States is therefore two-fold in seeking to protect civilians. First, we must ensure that we do not victimize innocent civilians in our armed conflicts; secondly, we must ensure that all civilian populations affected by such conflicts are protected and preserved in dignity as human beings. Even if they are refugees, displaced persons or returnees, civilian populations have the right to protection. That must remain a priority and a constant principle for States.

In addition, it seems appropriate to raise certain considerations, which I consider important for us if we are to succeed in our task of protecting civilians in the context of current conflicts. First, the primary protection of civilians is, first and foremost, their security. Therefore, it is essential that all peacekeeping operations are able, both in terms of their human and material resources and of their mandates, to ensure and defend the security and lives of citizens, both civilian and military, living in areas of operations. It is therefore up to us to question ourselves, above all, about the relevance of mandates that we initiate. We should get beyond the quasi-standard templates and ensure that for every situation, for every context, there is an appropriate peacekeeping mandate.

The example of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), right at our borders, demonstrates, if need be, that major operations can be put in place and prove inadequate or ineffective in the actual context. We must now question the MINUSMA mandate as designed and as MINUSMA has operated thus far. Today, a condition for the security of Malian and border populations is to change the force's mandate or to put in place a force modelled on the multinational joint task force that we established in the Lake Chad Basin to confront Boko Haram.

My second observation is derived from the first. Only an appropriate offensive mandate specific to each context can constitute the basis for the protection of civilians. The third observation is that States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations. In that context, the United Nations must do more to strengthen those States' capacity to act, as well as that of regional organizations in that regard. We must strengthen and give priority to States in all circumstances, subjecting them, of course, to the obligations of international morality and universal rights, but always considering States as the primary and essential instruments for the protection of civilians. Whenever States are weakened, the situation of civilians in conflict becomes problematic.

The fourth element of our reflections concerns the substance of the protection of civilians in conflict. In our view, in addition to preserving the security and lives of people, the protection of civilians must be understood as including access to basic social services, the protection of their human rights and the strengthening of the resilience of populations in conflict areas. Costs and arrangements for the protection of civilians must include the costs and arrangements for the minimum social services needed to ensure a decent life for every citizen.

The fifth observation is that, even if there is reason to recognize the role that non-governmental organizations can play in the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in particular because of their capacity for local communication, the fact remains that action or interventions by the latter should not be undertaken at the expense of the sovereignty of States and their primary responsibility in that regard.

Sixthly, I would like for the United Nations to regard assisting countries in conflict with the care of refugees and internally displaced persons as a matter of utmost urgency. As a result, with the actions of Boko Haram in the east and the jihadists in Mali, the Niger, while doing battle with terrorists on all fronts, must care for and accommodate more than 300,000 refugees and internally displaced persons. Therefore, prevention, predictability and the need for a rapid response also seem to us to be indispensable to ensuring the effective protection of civilians. We have the obligation to prevail on both fronts of our battle: defeating the terrorists and protecting civilian populations. If today we are

discussing the protection of civilians, it is because there are conflicts. There are wars that are taking place.

Today, on behalf of the Republic of the Niger, I would like to thank all the countries that help and support us in the struggle against terrorists, our struggle for the security of our country, our region and the world. Terrorists know no borders. I would therefore like to express my appreciation in particular to France, the United States, Chad, the European Union, the countries of the G5-Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin countries and all the many countries that I cannot mention here. May they find here the expression of our gratitude, which is an expression of our solidarity and capacity for generosity aimed at ensuring the triumph of a society of peace and freedom.