

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

Statement by H.E. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations

Let me thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate and for the strong interest and support your country has traditionally given to today's topic. I would like to also thank you for bringing about a very substantive presidential statement, which has our full support.

We would like to welcome Under-Secretaries-General Amos and Le Roy and thank them for their briefings. We are also pleased that High Commissioner Pillay is here with us again today. This is the third time running that she is participating in a debate on the protection of civilians, and we very much hope that this tradition will be continued. Finally, let me also thank Mr. Daccord for his intervention.

Today's debate is an important opportunity for my delegation to take stock of our common efforts in an area that has been at the core of my country's own engagement in the Council. The latest report by the Secretary-General (S/2010/579) provides us with an excellent basis for our discussion.

While we share the Secretary-General's assessment that more needs to be done to meet the five core challenges, we are also encouraged by the progress made over the past year in implementing resolution 1894 (2009). I would like to thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for their consistent work and support. We particularly welcome the draft operational concept on the protection of civilians, as well as the envisaged strategic framework. We also strongly support the Secretariat in its endeavour to further improve predeployment and in-mission training on the protection of civilians. That initiative needs to be accompanied by national and international efforts.

Host countries and the Council should come to a common understanding that our decisions to draw down missions or adapt mandates are conditioned on the achievement of clear benchmarks, including in relation to the protection of civilians. The establishment of a mechanism to measure and report on progress against such benchmarks would be very important, and we think that the experience gained in that context in the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad is useful and should be followed up.

Given the gravity and number of existing allegations, the recent arrests of commanders allegedly responsible for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are but a welcome start. The Council must ensure respect for its resolutions and take vigorous measures against perpetrators, including through the establishment of commissions of inquiry, referrals to the International Criminal Court and the imposition of targeted measures.

Mass rapes in Kibua in Eastern Congo in July and August this year have demonstrated the massive challenges we still face in preventing and responding to such atrocious crimes. As the presidential statement rightly underlines, peacekeeping missions must communicate with the local communities and must be equipped with the necessary capacities to do so. We expect the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on sexual violence to contain bold recommendations for improving our response, and we hope that the Security Council will be able to adopt a substantive outcome next month.

We share the concern of the Secretary-General over the threat posed to civilians by explosive weapons, particularly when used in densely populated areas, and I am grateful for the very clear words of Under-Secretary-General Amos on this subject. On 16 September, Austria, together with OCHA, hosted a panel discussion on that subject that clearly demonstrated the need for more systematic data and analysis. We hope the Council will become actively engaged on that important emerging subject.

We welcome the reference contained in the presidential statement on the need to find durable solutions to issues concerning internally displaced persons and refugees, and we hope for a more systematic consideration of that issue in relevant Council debates and resolutions. More systematic and comprehensive reporting on protection issues in the Secretary-General's country-specific reports will enhance the consistency of the Council's actions regarding the protection of civilians. Following the example of resolution 1325 (2000), this is

another area where we believe that indicators would be useful and that they should be developed by the Secretariat. That will allow the Council to assess the effectiveness of its own policies and measures. We are further looking forward to receiving the guidance for peacekeeping and other relevant missions on the reporting of protection of civilians that was requested in resolution 1894 (2009).

We are encouraged by the fact that the Secretary-General's report has noted a change in the way and extent to which protection is addressed in Council resolutions, including in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. We are convinced that the briefings received and our discussions in the Expert Group, as well as the use of the aide-memoire (see S/PRST/2009/1), have significantly contributed to this more consistent approach on the part of the Security Council. Let me express my gratitude to OCHA for undertaking the work to update the aide-memoire, which has been adopted in conjunction with the presidential statement today.

While our membership of the Security Council comes to an end next month, let me assure you, Mr. President, that my country will remain strongly committed to the subject of today's debate. In this context we are very much encouraged by the continuing strong interest of the membership of the United Nations in issues regarding protection of civilians, as is demonstrated by the broad attendance at today's debate. We look forward to continuing our cooperation with interested Member States and the Secretariat to further strengthen the protection of civilians in conflicts around the globe.