Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Briefing by Mr. Jan Eliasson, *Deputy Secretary-General of the* United Nations.

I thank you, Madam President, for convening this important and timely debate. I also wish to commend you, Madam, for inviting prominent and field-experienced representatives from the world of journalism to the Security Council today.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right guaranteed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It constitutes an essential pillar of any vital society. It depends on and is nurtured by independent and pluralistic media — the lifeblood of democratic and informed discourse and debate.

In the past decade, more than 600 journalists have been killed while exercising their critical role in service to society. Just 10 days ago, Somali television journalist Liban Abdullah Farah was shot dead on his way home. His murder drew widespread condemnation. Liban's assassination is not an isolated case. Today's debate is devoted to the protection of civilians with a special focus on the protection of journalists in armed conflict.

But let us not forget that journalists also are at grave risk in many non-conflict situations around the world. In situations of armed conflict, however, these critical representatives of the fourth estate are particularly vulnerable. Last year in Syria, 41 journalists, including those who use social media, were killed. In Iraq and Afghanistan, 108 journalists have been killed since 2006. The majority of the victims are local journalists and media staff. In many cases, murdered journalists are covering corruption and other illegal activities. In most cases, journalists receive threats prior to being assassinated.

Attacks on journalists also take the forms of abduction, hostage-taking, harassment, intimidation and illegal arrest. Women journalists are increasingly becoming victims of sexual harassment and rape.

Let us remember that every time a journalist is killed by extremists, drug cartels or even Government forces, there is one voice less to speak on behalf of the victims of conflict, crime and human rights abuses. Every journalist murdered or intimidated into silence is one less observer of efforts to uphold rights and ensure human dignity. The least we can do when a journalist is murdered is to ensure that the death is investigated swiftly and that justice is served. It is shocking indeed, and unacceptable, that more than 90 per cent of the assassinations of journalists go unpunished.

The United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was launched to create a free and safe environment for the media in conflict and non-conflict situations. It was approved in April 2012 by the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, with UNESCO in the lead. The basic rationale is that protecting free media is a prerequisite for freedom of expression and democracy. It is also relevant to the pursuit of peace and security, as well as development.

It should be noted that ensuring freedom of expression and access to independent media and information was highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. These values and principles are essential if we are to ensure the rule of law and effective institutions. Well-functioning and honest institutions are fundamental to development and prosperity.

The first phase of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists includes

implementation in selected countries, but let me emphasize that the need is equally great in many other countries. The Plan of Action is based on a multidimensional, multi-actor approach. It relies on participation and support from Governments, particularly through Ministries of Information, as well as from local media, civil society and academia. All United Nations entities are also encouraged in the Plan of Action to submit information that contributes towards greater safety for journalists and media staff.

The Security Council, too, can play an important role by reacting to and standing up against suppression of media freedom wherever and whenever it occurs. When journalists are killed, information about threats to international peace and security is often buried. When addressing situations on its agenda, the Council may therefore wish to particularly consider the targeting of journalists and other threats to freedom of expression.

Let me end by quoting the Secretary-General on this year's World Press Freedom Day in May. He said, "All journalists, across all media, need to be able to do their jobs. When it is safe to speak, the whole world benefits."