

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

Statement by His Excellency Mr. Leslie Kojouhar, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ghana to the United Nations

We thank the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for organizing this important debate. Ghana welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2010/579) and thanks Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos for her statement this morning. We also acknowledge the Security Council's long-standing commitment to addressing this issue.

Since the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and other relevant resolutions, the protection of civilians has remained a major issue in the Council's work. While we note the progress made, it needs to be said that events on the ground show that more attention has to be paid, especially as regards the full implementation of the resolutions adopted to protect civilians caught in conflict situations. Resolution 46/182 adopted by the General Assembly in 1991 places the responsibility for the protection of civilians, first and foremost, with their respective States, which are also expected to facilitate the work of responding organizations in times of conflict. However, it is not unusual to find that the State whose responsibility it is to protect its own populations is the perpetrator of the crimes against civilians. It is thus imperative for the Council to address impunity and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and improve access for and safety of humanitarian personnel.

Ghana continues to advocate the concept of the responsibility to protect recognized and adopted by world leaders in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1), which was a call to action that emphasized the need for preventive measures and for the delivery of international assistance to States in order to enhance their capacity to fulfil their primary responsibility to protect their own populations against genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

In that regard, on 24 September 2010, Ghana co-sponsored a ministerial meeting on the responsibility to protect under the theme "Fulfilling the responsibility to protect: strengthening our capacities to prevent and halt mass atrocities". What emerged was the clear commitment of participating Member States to prevent and halt atrocious crimes and the need for intervention by the international community. We therefore welcome ongoing discussions within the General Assembly with a view to clarifying and forging consensus on the scope and modalities for the practical application of the responsibility to protect. We also note with appreciation the Council's commitment to the special protection needs of women and children in armed conflict. In 2008, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1820 (2008), which for the first time identified as an impediment to international peace and security the use or commission of sexual violence as a tactic of war in order to deliberately target civilians or as a part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian populations. The Council's intention to consider targeted sanctions and other measures against parties in situations of armed conflict who commit rape or other forms of sexual violence against women and girls was very much welcomed. Regrettably, the Council has yet to designate sanctions for any perpetrators of violence against women, in spite of widespread reports that much abuse has taken place.

Ghana, which has remained among the top 10 contributing countries in peacekeeping and has also fulfilled its obligations with respect to the ratification of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, is particularly concerned about the reported involvement in that regard of peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel deployed by the United Nations to prevent, recognize and respond to sexual violence and other forms of violence against civilians. We urge the Security Council to take a firm stance in ensuring that such perpetrators are appropriately brought to justice.

Ghana remains committed to regional initiatives to deal with the issue of protecting civilians in armed conflict. The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, adopted in October 2009 to promote and strengthen regional and national measures to prevent or mitigate, prohibit and eliminate root causes of internal displacement, is a good case in point. Among other things, member States undertook to prevent violations of international humanitarian law against displaced persons. The African Union's continued presence in Somalia is therefore partly in recognition of that mandate, which requires the continued and increased support of the international community.

In conclusion, Ghana wishes to encourage greater participation by the international community in the work of regional organizations in order to strengthen the capacity of such bodies to enhance their protection of civilians and ability to intervene in conflicts. We also stress the need to prosecute and punish perpetrators as a deterrent to crimes committed with impunity.