

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

Statement by Mr. Kim Sook, Permanent Mission of Republic of Korea to the United Nations.

Let me express my sincere appreciation to you, Madam President, for convening this open debate. I would also like to thank Deputy Secretary--General Jan Eliasson and the four journalists for their comprehensive and informative briefings and compelling stories.

Journalists are killed, tortured and subjected to enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention, as well as intimidation and harassment, during conflicts. They reveal a clear picture of conflict situations, including the tragic suffering of civilians and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. That makes journalists the target of attacks by parties to a conflict who do not want their actions exposed.

Attacks against journalists also constitute violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Greater threats to journalists increases the risks of restricting the freedom of the press through the chilling effect of self--censorship. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the Human Rights Council resolution on the safety of journalists, adopted last year, and calls upon all parties to put an end to such practices and to provide special protection to journalists.

Despite the Council's action on the issue, including its historic resolution 1738 (2006) and last February's presidential statement on the protection of civilians (S/PRST/2013/2), violence against journalists persists. It is extremely disturbing that between 111 and 153 journalists reportedly have been killed during the past 28 months in Syria. The situation is also troubling in Somalia, where last year alone, 18 journalists were killed. We also condemn abductions of journalists in conflict situations. In that regard, Dutch journalist Judith Spiegel and her husband, kidnapped by an armed group in Yemen just over a month ago, should be released immediately.

Against that backdrop, I would like to underline the following points. First, those responsible for violations against journalists should be pursued and held accountable no matter how long it takes. It is alarming that a huge percentage of such perpetrators enjoys impunity around the world. Failure to undertake effective investigations and to prosecute those responsible for attacks will lead to further violence in the future. The primary responsibility for protecting journalists, investigating each violation and prosecuting those responsible lies with Governments and State institutions. To that end, the necessary resources should be dedicated to preventing and investigating attacks, as well as bringing those responsible to justice.

While the majority of victims are male journalists, we note with concern that female journalists are also subject to violations in conflict situations. They face additional risks, such as those of sexual violence or sexual abuse in detention. We believe that a gender-sensitive approach is needed when considering measures to address the issue of violence against journalists.

Secondly, my delegation would like to further encourage coordination and cooperation among United Nations agencies, Member States and civil society with regard to ensuring the safety of journalists. My delegation welcomes and fully endorses the 2012 United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. We are also pleased that implementation strategy and work plan have been prepared, including all relevant stakeholders and United Nations agencies such as UNESCO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme.

The role of civil society is significant, given its expertise in the field. We welcome the active engagement of civil society in the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action and would like to further encourage it. Civil society, for its part, should strengthen its efforts to raise awareness of the risks faced by journalists and existing international standards to protect them.

Thirdly, the scope of journalists should not be interpreted restrictively and protection should be provided to a broad spectrum of journalists. The emergence of online journalists — both professionals and untrained so-called citizen journalists — plays an increasingly important role in documenting and disseminating news in real time. Online journalists should also be afforded the same protection as offline journalists.

Last but not least, the Council needs to be more vigilant about the safety of journalists and consider including specific language on the protection of journalists in relevant documents. We welcome the fact that the Council, in resolution 2067 (2012) on Somalia, specifically condemned violence against journalists for the first time, and in resolution 2093 (2013), adopted in March, emphasized the obligation of the Government of Somalia with respect to the protection of journalists. We should consider the need for a similar approach in all relevant situations.