

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

Statement by H.E. Ms. Caroline Ziade, Deputy Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations

At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate. I also wish to thank Ms. Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; and Ms. Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for their briefings. I further thank Mr. Yves Daccord for his statement.

While the international community has endowed itself with a solid normative framework to protect civilians in armed conflict, actual compliance with the existing standards remains far from satisfactory. How do we translate this normative progress into concrete improvement in the lives of the hundreds of thousands of civilians who suffer extreme violence and hardship during conflict?

If successful compliance with protection standards requires an integrated and comprehensive protection strategy in collaboration with the main humanitarian actors, it remains that the primary responsibility for civilian protection rests with the concerned Government itself. Furthermore, occupying Powers have the clear obligation under international law to protect the population under foreign occupation. We would like to stress in this regard the implications of severe and sustained violations of international humanitarian law in the Palestinian-occupied territories and the appalling humanitarian situation confronting the 1.5 million Palestinians confined to the Gaza Strip.

There is a prevailing awareness that United Nations peacekeepers cannot protect everyone from everything. However, protection is most successful when it is part of a larger strategy. The development by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support of an operational concept and a framework to guide the preparations of protection of civilians strategies by missions is a good step in the right direction. There is a need, furthermore, to strengthen cohesion between mandates, resources and expectations, and to enhance peacekeeping capacity, especially in transport, communications and intelligence.

A mission that protects civilians under imminent threat but makes no progress in helping to address the underlying causes of the conflict will not lead to sustainable peace or to the durable and effective protection of civilian populations. The United Nations is invited to assist countries in advancing the peace process and peaceful coexistence through inclusive dialogue, reconciliation and reintegration. In the course of establishing genuine and sustainable peace, the rule of law and good governance should also be adequately addressed. The Security Council should also consider a more comprehensive and less selective approach to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Armed conflict is the source of devastating calamities. This is why, all around the world, brave and dedicated men and women strive to alleviate the suffering of innocent victims. All parties to a conflict should allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief to civilians in need.

In his recent report (S/2010/579) on the subject of our debate today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon suggests that the Security Council has long recognized that the maintenance of peace and security will not be achieved or sustained without due attention being paid to redressing grievances, ending impunity and protecting the human rights of civilians. Based on that principle, Lebanon reiterates its demand that Israel pay due compensation for the tragic human, environmental and material losses caused by the war it waged on Lebanon in 2006.

During and subsequent to that war, Lebanon suffered greatly from cluster munitions, which are indiscriminate in nature and have a devastating effect on civilians at the time they are used and long after the fighting has come to an end. Today, I am honoured to inform the Council that, earlier this month, my Government submitted its ratification instruments on the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Furthermore, Lebanon has offered to host the second meeting of States parties to the Convention in 2011. In that regard, we urge States that have not yet done so to ratify the Convention.

It is a moral imperative for us to prevent conflicts and to place the people in need of protection at the centre of our efforts and policymaking.