

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

***Statement by H.E. Mr. Bukun-Olu Onemola, Deputy Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations***

Let me begin by commending your initiative, Mr. President, in convening this important and timely debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Allow me to express my gratitude to Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Mr. Daccord, Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their informative briefings.

We welcome the Secretary-General's progress report (S/2010/579) and commend its analytical depth and consultative observations. Judging from the wideranging perspectives shared with us today, the protection of civilians in armed conflict is an important yet daunting global challenge. Therefore, the efforts to build consensus on the subject and the progressive development of normative frameworks to address civilian protection challenges, including resolutions 1894 (2009), 1882 (2009) and 1888 (2009), are encouraging developments.

We also recognize the contribution of some individual Member States and regional organizations to these developments. At the regional level, Nigeria is a signatory to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa — the Kampala Convention. Once the Convention enters into force, it will be the first legally binding regional instrument to impose an obligation on State parties to protect and assist internally displaced persons (IDPs).

At the international level, we commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for keeping the Security Council sharply focused on this issue. The 2009 joint study, the operational concept on the protection of civilians, and the newly updated aide-mémoire are important tools that the Council should continue to use to systematize our approach to protecting the rights and persons of civilians in armed conflict.

Despite those notable developments, the grim reality of today is that civilians are still casualties of conflicts and the direct targets of abduction, sexual violence and the denial of humanitarian access. Recent developments underscore the increasing difficulty that we face in addressing the five core challenges articulated in the Secretary-General's report, contained in document S/2009/277.

The acts of rape perpetrated by rebels in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in August and the recent assault on civilians in Western Sahara illustrate the magnitude of the task of civilian protection. Difficult protection challenges remain in Afghanistan and Somalia. Indeed, the impending referendums in the Sudan may present serious protection challenges for which the United Nations Mission in the Sudan, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and all United Nations actors on the ground must be prepared.

Protection requires early intervention and the swift deployment of humanitarian assistance by the international community. It also requires coordination and the pulling together of the capacities of the various multilateral agencies involved in efforts to bring relief to IDPs and refugees. I must stress that our growing understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of civilians in armed conflict must be marked by the ability and capacity to protect. In the same vein, while the trend towards mandating peacekeeping missions to protect civilians is a positive step, it is essential to support such aspirations with adequate resources.

As a major troop-contributing country, Nigeria is aware of the acute resource constraints that United Nations peacekeepers face in the field daily. Such constraints limit their ability to effectively protect civilians, guarantee safe passage for IDPs, facilitate the movement of humanitarian actors and, crucially, establish assessment and early-warning mechanisms to prevent a crisis. Indeed, better resourcing would make the exercise of benchmarking the outcomes of peacekeeping missions more accurate and effective.

As caretakers of international peace and security, our efforts should be directed at addressing those and other

constraints that militate against the effective protection of civilians. We therefore echo the Secretary-General's call for a comprehensive, consistent and accountable approach to protecting civilians in hostilities. In our view, the three additional actions suggested by the Secretary-General in his report will fundamentally enhance the protection of civilians.

In that respect, we firmly support the recommendation that the Council should avoid a selective approach to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. All cases requiring protection should be given equal emphasis, whether in Southern Sudan, Darfur, Somalia, Afghanistan or Western Sahara. When an issue requiring civilian protection is not on the Council's agenda, the United Nations should give its full support to the regional or subregional organization already addressing such issues.

It is evident that composite measures are required to protect civilians, prevent conflicts and deal with their consequences. There is the need for States to ratify and implement existing conventions and protocols on armed conflict. Efforts should be intensified to strengthen legal frameworks and mechanisms for monitoring and reporting attacks against civilians by State and non-State actors alike. In West Africa, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is a threat to the protection of civilians. We would therefore like to reiterate our call for the elaboration of an arms trade treaty.

Conflict prevention is fundamental to the protection of civilians. Practice has shown that it costs less to prevent than to control conflicts. That is why Nigeria fully supports region and subregional conflict prevention initiatives, and we encourage the Council to do the same.

Post-conflict peacebuilding efforts through the Peacebuilding Commission should also be intensified. Such peacebuilding strategies should not only address immediate challenges, but also lay the foundation for long-term development. We agree with the Secretary-General's recommendation concerning the need to develop a set of indicators for the systematic monitoring of and reporting on protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

Nigeria believes that the responsibility to protect civilians in armed conflict situations is a shared one, although the primary burden rests with national Governments. The cooperative engagement of all actors on the ground and of policymakers is necessary to support national Governments in securing and protecting their civilian populations.

The international community should remain vigilant and bear its fair share of our collective responsibility to protect civilians. If we act purposefully and in concert, we can better shield civilians from the ravages of armed conflict.

Mr. President, we support the presidential statement adopted earlier that was prepared under your guidance (S/PRST/2010/25).