

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, August 19th, 2013, Security Council Chamber

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

On this solemn day, the tenth anniversary of the bombing of the United Nations offices in the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, I wish to pay tribute to all those who have lost their lives while serving the Organization.

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for your presence here today and for having convened this significant debate. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General; Ms. Pillay, of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms. Amos, of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and Mr. Spoerri, of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their informative and insightful briefings.

International humanitarian law requires all parties to conflict to spare civilians from the effects of armed conflict. The Council, in its presidential statement on the protection of civilians (S/PRST/2013/2), adopted last February (see S/PV.6917), reiterated its call for strict compliance by parties to a conflict with their obligations under international law. However, civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in many conflict situations around the world.

The situation in Syria in particular poses a serious challenge to the protection-of-civilians agenda of the Council. According to the findings of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, murder, torture, rape, forcible displacement, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts are widespread in Syria, and civilians are bearing the brunt of the tragic hostilities.

Against that backdrop, my delegation would like to underline the following key points.

First, accountability is the key to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Those who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of international law must be held accountable. Impunity should not be an option. While the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other international tribunals play a crucial role, the Security Council must also do its part, including through the referral of relevant situations to the ICC. In that vein, the Republic of Korea has declared its support for the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Accountability requires verification, investigation and documentation of allegations of serious violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law. My delegation recognizes the significant contribution made by the international commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council or the Secretary-General, and reiterates its full support for them. Timely recourse to the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission established by Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions should also be encouraged with a view to ensuring more credible information.

Secondly, the implementation of protection mandates by United Nations peacekeeping missions should be further enhanced. Valuable progress has been made in that field since the open debate held last February, including the establishment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, with a strong protection mandate. In order to further improve the protection of civilians in conflict, we need to encourage effective interaction and better coordination among protection-mandated missions, host States and humanitarian organizations undertaking protection efforts in a spirit of cooperation. One step towards that end will be the increased use of

training modules on the protection of civilians, developed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, by States sending personnel to protection-mandated missions.

In that regard, I would like to recall that the presidential statement adopted in February requested the Secretary-General to include in his next report, due in November of this year, an assessment of the concrete measures taken by peacekeeping missions to implement their mandates in protecting civilians and the impact of such measures. I hope that the Council's next debate will be a valuable occasion to enhance the implementation of protection mandates by peacekeeping missions.

Thirdly, the use of explosive weapons with wide-area impact should be avoided in densely populated areas. My delegation is deeply concerned about the appalling civilian suffering that explosive weapons cause. It is disturbing that, as research has shown, more than 34,000 people were killed or injured by explosive weapons in 2012, and 78 per cent of those affected were civilians. The study found that 58 countries were affected by the use of explosive weapons, and the most severely affected countries include Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. My delegation believes that the international community needs to intensify its consideration of that issue through more focused discussions. The starting point should be gathering and analysing data on the use and impact of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The Arms Trade Treaty, adopted in April, presents a timely opportunity for the international community to address the human cost of the poorly regulated arms trade by prohibiting the transfer of arms that would be used in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and attacks directed against civilians. The Republic of Korea signed the Treaty in June and looks forward to its early entry into force.

Before concluding, my delegation would like to reaffirm the need for continued attention to vulnerable groups, including women and children. It is deeply disturbing that sexual violence continues to be a prominent feature of conflict and remains widespread, even in many current situations on the Council's agenda, including in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Somalia, the Sudan, South Sudan and Syria. As resolution 2106 (2013), on women and peace and security, adopted in June, emphasized, accountability should be ensured for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict, and women's political and economic empowerment should be further encouraged for the long-term prevention of sexual violence. To that end, the Council needs to strengthen its cooperation with all the relevant bodies in the United Nations system, including UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.