

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

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Statement by Ms. Leskovar, Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the United Nations

Allow me at the outset to thank France for having organized this open debate on protection of civilians. I would also like to thank Under-Secretaries-General Amos and Le Roy and Assistant Secretary-General Šimonovič for their important contributions to today's discussion.

Slovenia fully aligns itself with the statements delivered by the Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Human Security Network.

The situation of civilians in armed conflicts around the world remains alarming. Civilians continue to account for the majority of casualties in conflicts and are often the deliberate targets of different forms of violence by all parties to conflict. Special attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups, in particular women and children.

The issue of the protection of civilians is gaining importance in this Chamber. In November 2009, the Council took an important step forward with the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009) and introduced new provisions that focus on humanitarian access, the implementation of protection measures in peacekeeping operations, and monitoring and reporting. We welcome the informal consultations of the Security Council on the broader issue of protections of civilians that took place in February under the Brazilian presidency.

The Security Council's activities in protecting civilians have been of particular relevance over the past few months, particularly with the adoption of resolutions on Libya and Côte d'Ivoire. The Council proved that it can act both timely and decisively in order to protect civilians. We welcome the fact that the Council has started to address concerns with respect to the protection of civilians more systematically, and we call upon it to continue to address these concerns consistently in its country-specific resolutions and presidential statements.

As we have emphasized in our previous statements in this Council, impunity represents one of the major obstacles to the prevention of grave and systematic violations committed against civilians in armed conflict on the ground. All parties to conflict, including non-State actors, must comply with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. Ending impunity is essential if war-torn societies are to recover from conflict and to prevent any future human rights abuses. That is why we believe that the Council should also be sensitive to the issue of accountability when discussing country situations on its agenda.

In that context, we stand firm on the position that there can be no sustainable peace without justice. We therefore welcome the fact that resolution 1970 (2011) on Libya also contains a reference to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The systematic fight against impunity for grave crimes committed predominantly against civilians started with the establishment of international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and later on the ICC. In our opinion, the support of the international community and of individual States for those tribunals is of vital importance. Equally important is the cooperation of States with them. Slovenia reiterates its support for all international criminal tribunals, especially the ICC.

Situation-specific resolutions have increasingly called for protection to be prioritized in the implementation of peacekeeping mandates. We particularly welcome the development of comprehensive strategies on the protection of civilians, which assist missions in understanding the relevant threats facing civilians in their areas of operation and enable them to better channel their efforts towards addressing them. Special attention should be given to including appropriate wording on sexual and genderbased violence when formulating peacekeeping mandates, given the ongoing reports of mass rapes and similar crimes from conflict zones. It is essential that the Council provide peacekeeping missions with clear mandates and appropriate resources to enable peacekeepers to implement their mandate fully.

The impact of explosive weapons on civilians, particularly in densely populated areas, remains a concern. They cause severe harm to individuals and communities and increase suffering by damaging vital infrastructure. They continue to constitute an obstacle to the return of refugees and displaced persons, humanitarian aid operations,

reconstruction and economic development, as well as the restoration of normal social conditions, and have serious and lasting social and economic consequences for populations. Here, I wish to emphasize that my country implements various projects in the field of mine action carried out by the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, established by the Slovenian Government.

Let me conclude by stressing that the continuous support and engagement of the Council are crucial to the protection of civilians on the ground. The Council has recently demonstrated its willingness to act swiftly and decisively, together with relevant regional organizations, in responding to disproportionate attacks on civilians. Future efforts should seek the consolidation of such determination and of applicable international law into effective action on the ground.