

Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 12th February, 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Araud, Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations

I thank the briefers for their statements today. France aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, as well as with the statement to be made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

The protection of civilians is an issue that requires constant attention by the Security Council. It must be at the heart of its work. Peacekeeping operations are the primary instrument in that regard.

Since the adoption, five years ago, of resolution 1894 (2009), the Security Council, the Secretariat and all the relevant stakeholders have mobilized to improve the process of defining, monitoring and controlling the implementation of peacekeeping operations' mandates on the protection of civilians. All recent Council mandates now include a protection-of-civilians component. Such protection is therefore a priority under any circumstance. We must continue to develop that approach.

That is what we did in Mali. After the emergency intervention of French forces, the deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali — with a robust mandate to protect civilians — helped to stabilize the country and allowed for presidential and legislative elections to be held successfully. During our visit to the country, the Council was able to see the scope of what had been accomplished through the determined work of the United Nations. The Council also reiterated to the Malian authorities and armed groups the urgent need to launch an inclusive dialogue for a lasting solution in northern Mali, in order for the country to finally find peace.

That is what we must do in the Central African Republic. In that country, the intervention by the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic, supported by French forces — which will soon be supported by European forces — helped to prevent the atrocities being committed against civilians from spreading. The clashes have certainly not stopped, but there has been a kind of pacification of most of Bangui. Securing certain areas, especially near the airport, allowed humanitarian aid to be organized and better deployed. The mobilization of international assistance, in Brussels and then Addis Ababa, provides a glimmer of hope.

However, the situation remains precarious, especially in the provinces. Civilians continue to be attacked. African and French forces are faced with an unprecedented situation: the hateful willingness of two communities to settle accounts. Soldiers cannot contain crowds. Looting, rapes and lynchings thus continue despite our efforts. Therefore, given the magnitude of the challenges and the nature of the threat, the Council must shoulder its responsibilities quickly. What is needed is a multidimensional peacekeeping force with a significant amount of force, including, above all, police units that are able to restore order, since soldiers cannot fire on a crowd. Only such a force, with a strong civilian component and sustainable funding, will bring lasting stability to the country, help prepare for elections and begin a national reconciliation process. We can no longer allow the crisis to get worse, or we will risk the Central African Republic becoming a source of instability in the heart of Africa and mass atrocities being committed there.

Whatever the strength of the protection-of-civilians mandates given to peacekeeping operations, they will be effective only if the operations themselves are beyond reproach. That is why we welcome the policies implemented by the Secretary-General to ensure that the work of the United Nations fully respects human rights. The zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence, the limiting of contacts with persons indicted by the International Criminal Court to that which is essential to the mission of the Organization, and the due diligence and filter policies are indispensable to the work of peacekeeping operations. They guarantee the exemplary conduct that is required of the Organization. Compliance with those policies guarantees the credibility of the Organization's work in protecting civilians.

The effectiveness of peacekeeping operations in the protection of civilians also requires closer communication to be developed with local communities in order to build capacity to prevent and react to threats. That includes, of course, a linguistic component and the appropriate means for logistics and communication, such as the recruitment of community liaison assistants.

The French Mission regrets that the Secretariat does not believe that language skills should be an essential element considered for recruitment in the field. The French Mission recalls, as it has been doing in vain for several years now, that speaking the language of the populations can be useful — even if that language is French. As in previous years, I will not be heard, and as in previous years, the Secretariat will continue to recruit without taking language skills into account, and I have been the representative of France for five years now.

I will conclude by referring the situation in Syria. As the Geneva negotiations on the future of Syria resume, the regime continues to intensify its crackdown against civilians. Barrel bombings have continued in Aleppo, again causing several hundred civilian deaths last week. While an agreement led to the evacuation of civilians from Homs, humanitarian aid convoys leaving the Old City have been attacked by mortar fire. Those deliberate attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers are unacceptable. The Council can no longer accept such repeated and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, the primary responsibility for which lies with the regime. It must therefore call upon all parties to ensure immediate access for humanitarian aid to those in need.

The text of the draft resolution submitted yesterday by Australia, Jordan and Luxembourg is moderate. We would have preferred a stronger message, given the gravity of the crisis. But the text is a compromise to which all countries of good faith and goodwill should agree.

Furthermore, given the sense of impunity prevailing in Damascus today, the Council must send a clear message: the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria, starting with Bashar Al-Assad, should be brought to justice. That is why we once again reiterate our call for the Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.