

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

Statement by Mr. Grunditz, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries, namely, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

We welcome Lithuania's initiative to hold an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and we thank the four briefers for their important contributions and excellent leadership.

The Nordic countries welcome the latest report of the Secretary General under review today (S/2013/689), as well as the adoption by the Council of presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3 and its updated aide-mémoire. The Nordic countries also welcome the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" action plan, which puts the imperative to protect people and preventive efforts at the heart of United Nations strategies and operational activities. Promoting respect for international humanitarian law and human rights by States and non-State armed groups alike, and ensuring accountability for violations, is fundamental.

A new generation of peacekeeping mandates has emerged. Peacekeeping operations are increasingly given a robust mandate and are being deployed to places with high levels of violence. Efforts to protect civilians and minimize civilian harm should begin at the very early planning stages of a mission. We therefore encourage the efforts to strengthen the effective implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Ensuring that Council-mandated missions have a strong human rights-monitoring mandate and adequate, as well as modern, resources to implement the mandate should be part of those efforts. One starting point must be the mission-specific conditions, recognizing the different needs of men, women, boys and girls. The Nordic countries support the Secretary-General's human rights due diligence policy as an important tool to strengthen the implementation of human rights on the ground and to prevent atrocities.

The Nordic countries also strongly encourage the incorporation of a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations. As part of the Nordic Defence Cooperation, we have established the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations in Stockholm, and note with satisfaction that the demand for its services is increasing.

Attacks against humanitarian workers are war crimes, which may also amount to crimes against humanity, and should not go unpunished. We are deeply concerned at the increasing attacks against, and killing of, humanitarian workers and the impunity that persists for those crimes. We are particularly concerned that the denial of health care and food, as well as attacks on hospitals and schools, are deliberately used as a tool to inflict harm on the civilian population in some conflicts. That violates the most fundamental principles of humanity as well as humanitarian law itself. Attacking health care and food aid — which are core elements in humanitarian action — is indeed an attack against the whole humanitarian system. The horrific tragedy in Syria is a case in point. We call on the parties to that conflict immediately to uphold their obligations to protect civilians and to facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access to the whole territory. Immediate progress in humanitarian access is crucial for improving conditions for the civilian population in Syria. We support the adoption of a Security Council resolution to address this urgent matter.

Efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence in conflict must be strengthened. The Nordic countries welcome Security Council resolution 2122 (2013) and its much-needed focus on women's participation and empowerment. We look forward to it being translated into action.

Specialized capacity and focus are needed to prevent conflict-related sexual violence in United Nations operations. We welcome the deployment of women's protection advisers in five ongoing missions. We urge the Secretariat to undertake an early evaluation of their work to assess their

contribution in the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. We fully support the development and implementation of predeployment and in-mission training of peacekeeping personnel on sexual and gender-based violence. We must seek to ensure that all peacekeepers are being trained to the same standards and operate accordingly.

In order to combat sexual and gender-based violence, perpetrators must be brought to justice. All parties to an armed conflict should take all the steps necessary to ensure accountability, through national prosecutions or by referrals to the International Criminal Court. National capacity must be enhanced to investigate and prosecute those crimes.

The use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas puts the civilian population at grave risk of death and injury and increases the destruction of vital infrastructure. The indiscriminate and disproportionate use of explosive weapons that we witness in many situations today must never be accepted. The need to ensure appropriate restrictions on warfare in such areas remains one of the central challenges of contemporary armed conflict.

At the same time, experience from Afghanistan and Somalia demonstrates how armed forces may, if the will is there, in fact restrain the use of explosive weapons in populated areas without impeding military effectiveness. We support the Secretary-General's call for States to share information on policy and practice regarding that matter. We stand ready to contribute in developing practical measures and guidance on the basis of lessons learned.

Lastly, I should like to recall that the adoption and — even more important — the full implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty will be an important instrument in preventing armed violence and reducing human suffering, including gender-based violence.