

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

Statement by H.E. Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations

We thank you for organizing this important debate on the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict. We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Valerie Amos, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Alain Le Roy, and also thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay, and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Yves Daccord, for their informative briefings this morning.

Uganda remains concerned that civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties during situations of armed conflict. It is essential, therefore, to put in place effective safeguards for vulnerable persons during situations of armed conflict. We welcome the revised aide-memoire by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (S/PRST/2010/25, annex) as a practical tool that provides a basis for improved analysis and diagnosis of key protection issues, and we are of the view that there is a need to continue its use on a more systematic and consistent basis.

We continue to witness blatant attacks on civilians by armed groups, such as the Rwandan Defence Forces and the Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Lord's Resistance Army in the Central African region and Al-Shabaab in Somalia. We deplore those attacks and reiterate our call on the international community to strengthen its collective resolve to deal effectively with groups such as those. The existence of such groups is a clear reminder of the challenge that we all face in dealing with non-State actors who commit such heinous crimes against civilians.

It is essential that peacekeeping mandates are realistic and robust and that peacekeepers have the necessary tools to undertake their protection mandates.

It is also important to focus on achieving durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons, in particular their voluntary, safe and dignified return or local integration and resettlement. As a result of conflict situations, Africa hosts 11.6 million of the world's 26 million documented internally displaced persons. In this regard, we underscore the importance of the United Nations working with regional and subregional organizations like the African Union to find durable solutions to protection issues.

We remain concerned by the humanitarian impact of conflict, especially the excessive accumulation and destabilizing effects of small arms and light weapons, as well as the devastating impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war. Even more significant for us is the recognition of the needs of persons with disabilities as a vulnerable group brought about by the indiscriminate use of those weapons.

Uganda recognizes that States bear the primary responsibility to respect and ensure the human rights of individuals within their respective territories, as provided by the relevant international law. We reiterate our commitment to those principles and urge all parties to armed conflict to endeavour to meet the basic needs of the civilians affected by such conflict. We also underscore the responsibility of States to comply with their relevant obligations to end impunity. To that end, we recall the outcomes of the first Review Conference of the Rome Statute, held in Kampala in May and June of this year.

It is necessary that all parties to armed conflict emphasize the dignity of civilians by recognizing losses that result from armed conflict, even those from lawful combat operations. In that regard, we encourage all parties to conflict to provide meaningful amends to affected individuals and communities, such as financial assistance or funding for humanitarian aid programmes. We encourage all Member States to embrace the concept of making amends, not because there is any legal obligation to do so but simply in the interest of mitigating suffering and promoting humanity. A small gesture of compassion goes a long way in regaining the trust and understanding of the affected civilians. That has been the policy of the Uganda People's Defence Forces and continues to be implemented by the Uganda People's Defence Forces serving under the auspices of the African Union Mission in Somalia — AMISOM.

I would like to emphasize, however, that making appropriate amends never creates a licence to harm or an excuse for violations of international law. It is not a replacement for reparations, nor does it constitute an alternative for prosecuting those who are responsible for violations of international humanitarian law.

Finally, we pay tribute to the men and women of the United Nations who continue to serve in often difficult circumstances in the protection of civilians and, regrettably, sometimes pay the ultimate price.

Uganda thanks the delegation of the United Kingdom for its work on the presidential statement (S/PRST/2010/25) that we adopted this morning.