

Turkey

Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 7 July 2010

[Deputy Permanent Representative of Republic of Turkey to the United Nations,] Mr. (Fazli) Çorman (Turkey): I thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive statement. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes and High Commissioner Pillay for their extensive briefings.

The majority of casualties in armed conflicts continue to be civilians. We strongly condemn all deliberate attacks on civilians and the deaths resulting from the indiscriminate and excessive use of force. As the Secretary-General outlined in his statement, we are still witnessing challenges in different parts of the world in this field. However, the recent debates in the Council on the protection of civilians have been held under the shadow of the tragic developments in Gaza. Today's debate is no exception. Needless to say, recent incidents there have reminded us all once again of the importance of full compliance with international law and the principle of proportionality, and of ensuring safe humanitarian access to civilian populations, particularly to vulnerable groups such as women, children and disabled persons.

The protection of civilians — all civilians — is a moral imperative. International law has developed a plethora of rules to protect civilians and, as the High Commissioner for Human Rights also indicated, all parties to armed conflict must be held accountable to those rules. Still, even when parties fully comply with applicable law, many civilians become victims nonetheless. Turkey calls on parties to armed conflict to make amends to the civilians they harm in the same spirit and in view of their inherent human dignity. In this context, we would like once again to bring to the Council's attention our expectations regarding the investigation on the humanitarian convoy destined for Gaza.

The primary obligation for protecting civilians lies with States. The international community also has a responsibility to help protect civilians in situations where States fail to do so. We must address the actual problems on the ground, including in our decisions on peacekeeping mandates.

Turkey considers the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009) last November to be a turning point. We welcome the increased attention paid by the Council to protection issues. We recognize the importance of the Security Council's resolutions on women, peace and security, as well as on children and armed conflict, to further promote the protection agenda. We welcome the recently adopted resolutions on these areas. As we have long stressed, a stronger interaction among the Council, troop and police contributors, special representatives of the Secretary-General and missions contributes to greater coherence.

The protection of civilians during peacekeeping operations is another challenge. The commemoration of the Srebrenica tragedy this week should be a reminder to all of us.

We note the fruitful discussions on the protection agenda. We fully support them. However, we have three general observations.

First, there is the inclination to stress the importance of dialogue with non-State armed groups. While understanding its rationale, we believe that this new trend requires further careful elaboration of both its political and its legal aspects.

Secondly, calling counter-terrorist efforts armed conflict cannot be accepted. We strongly condemn acts of terrorism and the use of civilians as human shields, and acknowledge the legitimate right of Governments to combat terrorism.

Thirdly, the concepts of the protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect should not be mixed up with each other. In our view, they are two different concepts that must not be confused. We should strengthen the rule of law, human rights, democracy and good governance for the long-term, lasting protection of civilians. We should ensure that the perpetrators of violence against civilians are held fully accountable for their actions. They should know that they will eventually face justice.

I would like to conclude by thanking Under-Secretary-General John Holmes for his excellent and tireless work for the United Nations humanitarian cause, and I wish him all the best in his future endeavours.