

I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

**Mr. Nazarian** (Armenia): Thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this essential debate. We join previous speakers in thanking the Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General Holmes for their briefings and their active involvement in addressing this important subject.

Armenia aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. We would also like to make some remarks in our national capacity.

The frequency with which the Security Council addresses this issue signifies the urgency of the matter and the need for the international community to fulfil its commitment to protect civilians, through the implementation of the provisions of international humanitarian law. Therefore, we share the views expressed by Council members and other speakers, which call for more systematic attention to protection. We believe that this issue should be frequently reflected in the deliberations of the Security Council.

We are also convinced that increased efforts to fight impunity at the national and international levels are essential. Armenia therefore welcomes the Austrian initiative to hold this open debate. It provides an opportunity to recap and reflect on the Council's past experience in dealing with the issue of the protection of civilians and to highlight priority aspects for united practical action. In a lessons-learned process, this debate should also enable the Council to more effectively address specific concerns related to the protection of civilian populations.

The Council has to send a clear message to all parties to armed conflicts, reminding them of their obligations and condemning violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

It is unfortunate that, despite the existence of international legal instruments and normative mechanisms, innocent civilians, including women, children and older persons, as well as international humanitarian personnel, continue to suffer in conflict situations.

Armenia believes that the international community must effectively seek thorough compliance by all parties with the norms of international humanitarian law. The relevance of that need was underscored by the tragic events in the early 1990s in Nagorny Karabakh, when only Armenia's involvement prevented ethnic cleansing, which had been subtly conducted by Azerbaijan during the 70 years of Soviet rule and was aimed at wiping out Armenians from their ancestral homes.

The position held by Azerbaijan, with its long-established distortion of facts, came as no surprise to us. In 1992, the Azerbaijani President told the European media that responsibility for the slaughter of the civilian population of the Azeri city of Khojalu, which was referred to in this Chamber, near Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorny Karabakh, completely lay with the Azeri opposition group, the Azerbaijani National Front. In the days following the event, President Mutalibov, in an interview with Czech journalist Dana Mazalova, said that the militia of the Azerbaijani National Front had actively obstructed and actually prevented the exodus of the local population through the mountain passages which had been especially left open by Karabakh Armenians to facilitate the flight of the civilian population.

The hope and the intention of the Azerbaijani side was to utilize civilian losses of such a magnitude to instigate a popular uprising against the Baku regime and seize the reins of power. The attempts of the Azerbaijani authorities to resolve the dispute militarily brought about unexpected consequences for them. What had promised to be a quick campaign to rid Nagorny Karabakh of its native Armenian population turned out to be an exhausting military conflict with a loss of territory, numerous casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons on both sides.

In that conflict, as in any other conflict, it is civilians living on both sides of the border who continue to suffer the consequences of the unresolved dispute.

The peaceful resolution of any conflict is not an easy enterprise and requires strong political will and painful compromises from both sides. We believe that the time has come to

replace the unchanged rhetoric of warmongering and hollow allegations with constructive steps aimed at making the environment more conducive to a peaceful settlement.

Armenia remains committed to the peaceful resolution of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict and strongly believes that a fundamental resolution of the problem can be achieved only by peaceful means based on the principles of international law.

We believe that the Security Council should further contribute to the strengthening of the rule of law and to upholding international law by supporting criminal justice mechanisms.