

I now invite His Excellency Mr. Pamphile Goutondji, Secretary-General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, African Integration, Francophonie and Beninese Diaspora of Benin, to take the floor.

Mr. Goutondji (Benin) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time that we have taken the floor this month in the Security Council, my delegation warmly congratulates you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Zambia on behalf of the Group of African States.

Benin served as a sponsor of resolution 1894 (2009), adopted by the Security Council this morning. We did so to demonstrate our commitment to the efforts made by the United Nations over the past 10 years to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Since the Council began to consider that issue, it has been able to correct the discrepancies that had made the United Nations a powerless observer in the face of grave violations of vital principles whose preservation is one of its fundamental goals. In that regard, we should commend the progress made by the Security Council by, inter alia, adopting a series of general and specific resolutions providing for the gradual establishment of a system for implementing protection measures on the ground.

Here, we should highlight the growing effectiveness of the mechanisms put in place by resolution 1612 (2005), initiated by Benin, to provide for monitoring and reporting on children in situations of armed conflict, and resolution 1882 (2009), negotiated by Mexico, to broaden the scope of that mechanism. We should also note the resolutions recently adopted at the initiative of the United States of America to combat sexual violence against women and children in conflict situations.

Another step forward is the systematic inclusion of civilian protection in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. Unfortunately, this has not always been accompanied by the provision of the capacity needed to ensure that this protection is effectively provided. Populations in conflict zones continue to pay the high price of this gap, as we have seen in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, Afghanistan and many other theatres of operation.

Benin welcomes the discussion on the subject initiated by the Secretariat in its document entitled "A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for United Nations Peacekeeping". The robust concept of operations it proposes is logical, because we must ensure that a mission receives adequate resources in keeping with the situation on the ground and the nature of the risks to populations under threat. In that regard, the existence on the ground of a credible intervention capacity can itself be a deterrent, making it possible to keep a population safe from acts of violence to which they could be exposed in situations of high vulnerability.

We agree on the need for an in-depth discussion to identify all the implications of deploying robust missions, taking into consideration criteria for the use of force in the light of the basic principles for the deployment of peacekeeping operations and the need to make adjustments to rules of engagement. Peacekeeping operations mandated to protect civilians must have determined and effective political backing in accordance with the principle of civilian control of armed forces, in order to maintain the legitimacy of United Nations action.

In recent years we have also seen progress in deterring massive violations of the human rights of civilian populations, with the strengthening of the international community's political will to step up efforts to combat impunity for serious crimes perpetrated in conflict situations. The International Criminal Court and the ad hoc United Nations tribunals play a crucial role in that regard. We urge United Nations Member States to provide the cooperation needed to enhance the authority of judicial bodies, both nationally and internationally, with strict respect for the principle of complementarity.

In addition to those measures, which focus on coercion, my delegation welcomes the importance attached to the dissemination of information about international humanitarian law among stakeholders in armed conflict and to training stakeholders in human rights and refugee law, as a way of ensuring the protection of civilian populations affected by conflict. The criminal nature of massive displacements, the deliberate targeting of civilians, attacks against

humanitarian personnel and the denial of humanitarian access to vulnerable populations should receive special attention through campaigns to raise awareness and through training on international humanitarian law, in the light of the increased use of those tactics in conflicts that are on the agenda of the Security Council.

Nevertheless, my delegation remains convinced that the best way to protect civilians from armed conflict is to engage in effective preventive diplomacy, which can prevent the outbreak of conflicts, with their unforeseeable consequences for human dignity.

Finally, my delegation associates itself with this morning's appeal by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights for the provision of effective assistance to the victims of human rights violations linked to armed conflict.