

Statement by Botswana at the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council

Protection of Civilians

12 February 2014

(Unofficial Transcript)

Let me congratulate Lithuania on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February and for organizing this debate. We appreciate the briefings by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689), which is the basis of our discussions today.

Botswana attaches great importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Our contribution to the discussions on that thematic area, including peacekeeping, and on how best to assist Governments in protecting their own populations remains a key priority for my delegation. We remain committed to the promotion of and respect for humanitarian principles in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. We believe that this is the best way to achieve an effective delivery of humanitarian assistance and the necessary space to access vulnerable populations in conflict situations. To that end, we reiterate our long-held belief, which is shared by many, that States have the primary responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The promotion of accountability for human rights violations and access to justice also remains a key issue for my delegation. Botswana joins the international community in deploring the continuing human rights violations in battlefields around the world where innocent civilians have become casualties of merciless killings by warring factions. We are disheartened by the fact that perpetrators of those crimes continue to undermine international humanitarian law and human rights law through their acts and deeds.

As a friend and supporter of the International Criminal Court, we have a commitment to upholding the rule of law, and we have strong faith in the institution as an international court of last resort. We remain concerned that hundreds of human rights abusers remain at large, frustrating the course of justice and endangering innocent women and children. We call for collaboration and coordination between the International Criminal Court and the United Nations, through its peacekeeping missions, to hunt down, arrest and investigate perpetrators of human rights abuse. We believe that this synergy will go a long way in strengthening the international criminal justice system and putting a human face on the victim. We believe that the international community, as a peace-loving world, has a moral obligation and responsibility to intensify efforts to protect innocent civilians, especially women and children, who are often victims of torture and rape and other sexual abuse.

Turning to the report of the Secretary-General, my delegation takes note of the five core challenges to enhancing the protection of civilians. We note that several initiatives are being pursued in that regard. We also recognize the attention drawn to the concerns expressed by an increasing number of States about the emergence and use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We share the Secretary-General's view on the need to strengthen the protection of civilians from the use of those weapons and that parties to any conflict should refrain from their use.

With regard to the role of peacekeeping and other missions, we take note of the deployment of peacekeeping operations and special political missions in many countries around the world as the most significant action taken by the Security Council. The proliferation of such missions illustrates just how instrumental they are in the maintenance of international peace and security. We recognize the complex and violent environments in which peacekeeping personnel operate. We also share the view that care and attention should be given to strengthening missions' capabilities. To achieve that, we believe that constant training and capacity-building of personnel before deployment is an absolute necessity.

Botswana believes that timely and unimpeded humanitarian access is a fundamental prerequisite for humanitarian action to save the lives of civilians. However, we note with regret the challenges that continue to constrain humanitarian response in a number of situations, as stated in the report, including restrictions on movement and violence against humanitarian workers.

Regarding accountability for war crimes and violations of human rights and humanitarian law, we note the important measures that some States continue to be take, but we believe that more needs to be done to support the Secretary-General's recommendations in that regard.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Botswana's support for the international community's efforts to protect innocent civilians. I wish to stress the importance of consolidating and ensuring the implementation of the existing normative frameworks on the protection of civilians in country-specific situations.

Finally, we support efforts for better coordination and cooperation within the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, as well as with other peacebuilding actors, for promoting engagement in fragile and conflict-affected countries.