

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation welcomes the holding of this debate. We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his briefing.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Council's first discussion of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. For the past decade, the international community has focused increasing attention on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and the Council has adopted numerous resolutions and presidential statements in this regard.

However, in today's world, there are still large numbers of civilians who find themselves harmed and affected by armed conflict. The international community therefore still faces a long and arduous task in protecting civilians. We are deeply concerned about the threats posed by armed conflict to the lives and property of civilians. We urge all parties to conflict to respect international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Council by protecting the lives, property and legitimate interests of civilians.

The Council, as the nucleus of the United Nations collective security mechanism bears the main responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The protection of civilians should be addressed comprehensively within the larger framework of a political process aimed at the peaceful resolution of conflict. It is important to tackle this problem upstream and to do everything we can to prevent and reduce the number of conflicts in order to eliminate the harm to civilians caused by armed conflict.

Responsibility for the protection of civilians falls first and foremost on national Governments. The international community and external organizations may provide constructive assistance. However, while doing so they must abide by the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter and fully respect the will of the countries concerned and their sovereignty and territorial integrity. They must do all they can to avoid wilful intervention in that regard. When it comes to fighting impunity and achieving justice, we are in favour of granting an important role to national courts and tribunals as the main avenue to achieving that goal.

The Council has an active role to play with regard to advancing the call for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. However, China has never been in favour of the Council resorting to the use of or threatening the use of sanctions at every turn. Special care must be taken in particular when addressing the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It must be reemphasized that national Governments have the right to take law enforcement action to fight terrorists, extremists and separatists in their territory, in order to safeguard their own and the region's security, peace and stability.

Law enforcement action taken by national Governments in the fight against terrorism has nothing to do with armed conflict. Therefore, the international community may not take steps to limit or intervene in the legitimate law enforcement actions of national Governments, based on the pretext of the protection of civilians.

The majority of conflicts take place in the underdeveloped regions of the world. One of the many and varied causes of armed conflict is poverty and the accumulated lack of progress in economic development. The United Nations has an important role to play in mobilizing international resources and providing financial and technical assistance to the countries concerned.

When it comes to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, we must not rely solely on the efforts of the Council. The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and regional organizations should play their respective roles in helping to develop national economies, resolving conflict and protecting civilians. China also welcomes the active involvement by non-governmental organizations in that regard. China is ready to work together with other members of the international community to achieve concrete results on the protection of civilians through pragmatic and effective efforts.