

I give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

**Ms. Blum** (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your work as President of the Security Council during the month of May.

I should also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his briefing and for his intensive work since he assumed his post.

The topic of today's debate is particularly relevant not only for the Security Council, but also for all States Members of the United Nations, and we therefore appreciate the convening of this debate.

The decrease in violence indices in Colombia continues to be the subject of wide recognition. At the same time, and especially in some regions of the country, threats persist that affect certain sectors of the population and prevent them from enjoying their rights. The actions of illegal armed groups, drug trafficking and terrorism are the core negative factors jeopardizing the rights, personal freedom and property of those citizens. As was pointed out by Under-Secretary-General Holmes, those groups continue to perpetrate serious infractions, including mass displacements, against civilians.

For the Government of Colombia, the protection of civilians and strict compliance with international humanitarian law and other relevant international norms are absolute priority objectives. My Government rejects any action against civilians that violates those norms.

Freedom and human rights can be fully realized when order, security and the rule of law are guaranteed. The Government of Colombia, guided by that principle and by its democratic security policy, is persevering in its efforts to protect all its citizens and guarantee the enjoyment of their rights.

The results achieved in the five years of implementation of the democratic security policy in Colombia have generated a virtuous circle in which security contributes to a rising level of confidence in the country and fosters private and social investment, which in turn helps to improve the living conditions and security of the population. Compared to the situation in 2002, in 2007 there was a substantial decrease in the rates of homicide, which were reduced by more than 40 per cent; the killing of union members, which dropped by 92 per cent; and extortive kidnapping, which fell by more than 86 per cent.

More than 46,000 people have been demobilized from illegal armed groups, individually or collectively. Through the special programme for the protection of union members, human rights activists and other threatened persons, some 9,500 persons have received protection. As of January 2008, none of the union members under protection, who represent some 20.7 per cent of the total number of persons in the programme, had been a victim of violence.

In 2007, the number of new cases of persons displaced by violence remained below 60 per cent compared to the figures of 2002. Some 82 per cent of all households included in the registry of displaced persons have received humanitarian emergency assistance, and more than 38,000 families have received State support in the process of return or resettlement. The programme supporting those affected by displacement applies a comprehensive support strategy to families by promoting income-generating activities and socio-economic stabilization.

The Government of Colombia is guided by the core premise that the primary responsibility for protecting civilians rests with the State. In turn, every State may appeal for international support when it is deemed necessary. In that context, the United Nations and the international community in general have a role to play in support of national protection efforts. If humanitarian assistance is to be trustworthy and predictable, it must be undertaken in conformity with the United Nations Charter and the principles it enshrines.

During the debate that took place in November 2007, my delegation expressed some opinions on the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, among them that to create a Security Council working group on the issue. We are of the opinion that the existing institutional structures are sufficient to allow the United Nations to address issues concerning the protection of civilians in an adequate and effective manner. Rather than create

new entities, the work must be aimed at supporting efforts to protect civilians in specific situations and take the specific conditions of each case into account.

It is equally necessary to maintain an adequate level of cooperation between the Security Council and other relevant organs of the United Nations. Such coordination is all the more productive when the Council operates within the limits of its competence. In that respect, we must support efforts to improve the operational and legal framework of the United Nations in the protection of civilians, and the role of the General Assembly as the organ competent to adopt policy guidelines in the humanitarian field.

The protection of civilians is a noble objective consonant with the human values of our Organization. Action in that field must consequently transcend individual interests and be legitimized as strictly humanitarian work. Only thus can assistance to the civil population be effective and fully accomplished.