

I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Colombia.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, and the Austrian delegation for your work in the Council presidency for the month of November. The presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the initiative to convene this debate highlight the importance of the subject matter of this meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights for their valuable presentations.

Ten years after the Security Council began to address the issue of the protection of civilians in conflict, the contributions of this organ have been significant. The adoption of four resolutions and several presidential statements, as well as the aide-mémoire agreed upon as a guide for the protection of civilians, are noteworthy advances. This meeting of the Council therefore represents a useful opportunity to evaluate such progress and explore other alternatives that contribute to the protection of the civilian population in situations of conflict or violence.

Through its democratic security policy, the Government of Colombia has consolidated its activities to strengthen and guarantee the rule of law throughout the national territory. The implementation of this policy has allowed us to establish more stable conditions for the protection of Colombians and their enjoyment of their rights.

Through this effort, the criminality and violence indicators have fallen to levels not experienced in many years. In 2002, the country had no police protection in vast areas of its territory. The presence of the national police and the military forces has resulted in a dramatic drop in the violence indicators. Since that year, homicides have fallen by 44 per cent, extortive kidnappings by 88 per cent, the number of massacre victims by 96 per cent, and terrorist attacks by 79 per cent. Today, the homicide figures are the lowest they have been in 22 years. Extortive kidnappings have reached their lowest level in the last decades.

The demobilization of more than 52,000 armed men also reflects the effectiveness of the policy. More people are demobilized every day than are captured, and more are captured than killed. The State seeks above all to defend life and has the fundamental objective of ensuring better conditions for the entire civilian population.

Colombia is guided by the basic premise that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians falls to the State. And each State may turn to the appropriate international cooperation mechanisms, depending to its priorities. In this context, the role of the United Nations and the international community is to support national protection efforts.

That primary responsibility and the role of the States are particularly relevant with respect to humanitarian assistance in their territories. My country recognizes in that regard the importance of cooperation and the facilitation of access to humanitarian organizations, in accordance with applicable international law. If humanitarian assistance is to be reliable and predictable, it must be delivered in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

As pointed out in the concept paper circulated to the Council, the compliance of armed non-State actors with their obligations towards civilians is of particular relevance. In this regard, an approach that encompasses the particular issues and specific circumstances of each situation is indispensable. Any initiative in this field must take into account the central role of Governments and applicable national legislation. In a context of cooperation, action should seek first to require armed non-State actors to cease their violent actions against civilians.

Every year, hundreds of civilian victims throughout the world — men, women and children — see their rights violated and their lives disrupted by the use of anti-personnel mines. Colombia will have the honour to host the Second Review Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which will take place in the city of Cartagena from

29 November to 4 December.

The action plan to be adopted in Cartagena will be an opportunity to make the strengthening and development of the Convention a shared aim of Governments, international organizations and civil society. The goals achieved and the remaining challenges to the implementation of the Ottawa Convention should encourage the international community to continue pursuing the higher goal of achieving a world free of anti-personnel mines. The fight against this scourge is a direct contribution to actions in favour of the civilian population and should hence be supported with a high level of commitment and political will.

The implementation of effective controls to the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons is also indispensable. My country will continue to promote this issue in the General Assembly, and expects the Security Council to promote the adoption of effective controls in this area. The illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons threatens civilian security, increases crime and causes the death or permanent disability of thousands of people. Without decisive action against this illicit trade, initiatives to protect civilians may be incomplete and ineffective.

The Government of Colombia reaffirms its condemnation of any action aimed against civilians. Their protection and strict compliance with international humanitarian law and other relevant international norms are matters of absolute priority that will continue to guide my country's policies.