

Mr. Vilović (Croatia):

Let me begin by congratulating you and your delegation, Sir, on your presidency of the Security Council for the month of May. I assure you of the full support of my delegation. I also thank you and your delegation for initiating this meeting and bringing the Council together to discuss an issue that is critically important to the Republic of Croatia, and surely to all nations.

Allow me to thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović for their enlightening briefings. Their presence here today shows the clear commitment of the United Nations to placing this issue at the highest possible level.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union. I would now like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

In our opinion, the question of the protection of civilians in armed conflict deserves more consistent attention from the Council. Statistics over the past 20 to 30 years clearly show that civilian casualties in conflict areas have consistently outnumbered military casualties and continue to do so. In the twenty-first century we are still witnessing gross violations of international humanitarian law in which civilians are increasingly and deliberately becoming a primary target of armed groups. It is evident that the nature of contemporary conflict has changed. Nowadays, in the conduct of armed conflict, civilians more often than not become the targets of armed attacks and atrocities that include murder, deportation and ethnic cleansing, as well as rape and sexual violence, which have thus become weapons of war.

This goes directly against the commitments made in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (General Assembly resolution 60/1), as well as the relevant Security Council resolutions that reaffirm the provisions of paragraphs 138 and 139 in that document. The international community should encourage and help States to exercise their responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Such acts of violence must be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators brought to account. It is therefore imperative that the International Criminal Court, as well as national courts, be the crucial focus of justice for victims, and thus a reminder that there can be no tolerance for any criminal act.

This has proved a valuable tool in combating impunity, a corrosive force that can undermine opportunities for reconciliation and building lasting peace. Over the years, the Security Council has acted in numerous other ways to enhance the agenda of the protection of civilians. The Council has promoted the use of mediation in order to help prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts in crisis situations. It has used its influence on parties to armed conflicts to observe standards of protection, including by imposing targeted measures against parties in cases of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. We should not be seen to be deficient in fulfilling our commitments.

Despite several positive developments in the Council, Croatia remains extremely concerned about the severity and prevalence of attacks on civilians, especially women and children. The Council has a responsibility to respond to situations of armed conflict where humanitarian assistance is being deliberately obstructed, not merely by calling on the parties involved to allow unimpeded passage to relief, but also by imposing targeted measures in grave instances of the wilful impediment of the delivery of such supplies. The Council needs to provide strong and effective leadership on this issue, including by taking concrete action when necessary, with the ultimate aim of ending mass atrocities. We thus support the international community's increased preparedness to take collective action through the Security Council when national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from violations of humanitarian law.

In addition, we express our deep concern over the further worsening of the situation in Libya and plead for the cessation of violence that is claiming more victims by the day. We harshly condemn the use of force by the Al-Qadhafi regime against civilians and demand that such violence cease immediately. As a country taking active part in the international efforts to prevent further civilian casualties in Libya, Croatia fully supports the implementation of resolution 1973 (2011) on establishing a no-fly zone and stiffening the existing sanctions against the Al-Qadhafi regime imposed under resolution 1970 (2011). Once more, we recognize the importance of fully respecting the legal framework and mandate set out by the relevant resolutions in order to take, individually or through regional organizations and arrangements — especially by members of the League of Arab States and the African Union — all necessary measures to protect civilians in Libya.

Additionally, we share the deep concern over the humanitarian situation, the number of casualties and the escalation of violence in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, as well as in the now-appeased Côte d'Ivoire. We invite the governing structures in these countries to refrain from using violence against political opponents and civilians who are committed to change. Continuing repression leads to unnecessary killings, strengthens antagonisms and contributes to the radicalization of certain social and political groups. Political, economic and social reforms are necessary for restoring lasting and non-oppressive stability in those countries, and they can be implemented only through a comprehensive national dialogue.

Croatia also co-sponsored a resolution adopted during the special session of the Human Rights Council on 29 April, whereby it condemned the use of lethal violence against peaceful protestors by the Syrian authorities and urged the Syrian Government to put an end to all human rights violations and respect all fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of expression and of assembly.

Lastly, I would like to welcome the establishment of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which we see as a step forward in strengthening a heightened profile for human rights in the United Nations system. We commend the Office for its consistent and structured work and its integrated approach to human rights, which is necessary to enhance the protection civilians in armed conflict. We look forward to our continued cooperation.