

Mr. Palouš (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the European Free Trade Association country Iceland, member of the European economic area, as well as Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Let me thank the presidency of the Security Council, Turkey, for organizing this debate and commend Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his informative briefing on the issue. The European Union thanks the Secretary-General for submitting the current report (S/2009/277) and supports the recommendations therein.

First, the European Union remains of the view that the protection of civilians is a key aspect of the United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts that has to be comprehensively, systematically and consistently incorporated in all Security Council mandates. At least eight of the current operations have an explicit mandate to protect civilians, and we welcome that development. We look forward to considering the results of a study of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on how to make the activities of the United Nations missions more effective in that regard.

The European Union expresses its firm support for the work of the Security Council Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians. The Expert Group is an innovative tool for deeper consideration of protection issues and its potential should be fully used. In turn, the European Union encourages the Council to give further practical relevance to its own aide-memoire (S/PRST/2009/1, annex) on the protection of civilians. It should be translated into concrete improvements in the protection of civilians on the ground.

In general, the European Union also emphasizes the need for close coordination and meaningful positive synergies of policies on the protection of civilians within the framework of United Nations activities in other areas, such as human rights, gender equality, children in armed conflict, the rule of law, small arms and light weapons, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and security sector reform.

The European Union emphasizes the need to operationalize the concept of the responsibility to protect. All heads of State and Government endorsed the principle of responsibility to protect in 2005, and the European Union continues to call for the full implementation of that principle by the Security Council, as well as by the General Assembly.

Regretfully, civilians continue to be gravely affected by conflicts. The Security Council must react to the changing nature of threats to international peace and security. The European Union calls on all parties to conflicts to ensure the protection of civilians at all times and to comply with international humanitarian and human rights law. Thus, we strongly encourage the Governments concerned to engage in full protection of internally displaced persons and their return and in the protection of children affected by the armed conflict. International humanitarian law should be fully respected. All violations of human rights and international humanitarian law should be investigated and those responsible should be held accountable.

The European Union also supports the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Security Council Working Group on that subject. We urge the Working Group to redouble its efforts in transforming the normative work of relevant Council resolutions into results at the field level.

Women's participation in the peace processes is fundamental to the protection and promotion of women's human rights in conflict-affected situations. The European Union strongly supports enhancement of the role of women in protection issues, also in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), which reconfirm that guaranteeing the protection of women and girls in armed conflict through effective institutional arrangements contributes significantly to promoting and to maintaining international peace and security. The European Union is looking forward to the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1820 (2008).

In many conflict situations, impunity prevails due to the lack of political will. Therefore, the Security Council, once again, should make clear that any assault on the civilian population, including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, is completely unacceptable. In that context, we would also like to stress the importance of the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1820 (2008). The European Union encourages all States to provide their full support to the International Criminal Court by acceding to the Rome Statute and cooperating with the Court.

The European Union continues to support efforts by the United Nations and its agencies, as well as by civil society and non-governmental organizations, to alleviate the suffering of civilians on the ground and to work towards achieving durable stability. Safe, unhindered and timely access to civilian populations in conflict is a fundamental condition for the fulfilment of mandates and missions of humanitarian actors. We encourage humanitarian personnel on the ground to follow the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, and we call on the recipient countries to ensure their safety and security.

The European Union is dedicated to systematic consideration of the issues of human rights, gender and children affected by armed conflict in the planning and conduct of its European Security and Defence Policy missions and operations, including their mandates and staffing. The European Union attaches particular importance to enhanced European Union-United Nations cooperation in the area of the protection of civilians in those theatres of operation where the United Nations and the European Union have missions deployed side by side. The most prominent example of such deployment is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the European Union has two missions deployed: the EU security sector reform mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the EU police mission in that country.

Furthermore, the European Union is determined to assist in implementing resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) with the aim of achieving more concrete progress on gender equality issues and thus adding to the credibility and effectiveness of those missions and operations on the ground.

The European Union joins the Secretary-General's call on the international community to seize the opportunity of this tenth anniversary of the protection of civilians to reinvigorate its commitment to this agenda and, above all, to make the protection of civilians more systematically and consistently a reality for all those caught in conflicts. Let me reassure the Council of the European Union's continued commitment to the issue of the protection of civilians.