

Mr. Lomaia (Georgia): The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is among the priorities of the Human Security Network, and I would like to thank the Turkish presidency for the organization of this important debate. In recent years, the international community has kept the issue firmly on its agenda.

The delegation of Georgia fully associates itself with the statement made by the Czech presidency of the European Union.

Last year, the citizens of my country suffered a massive foreign military invasion, followed by the occupation of up to 20 per cent of our territory. This war took the lives of 600 citizens of Georgia, most of them civilians. Over 130,000 were forced from their homes in a move that was branded as ethnic cleansing by a major European intergovernmental body. Satellite images obtained by the Operational Satellite Applications Programme of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research confirm the deliberate and targeted destruction of dozens of villages inside the territory occupied by regular Russian forces and proxy militia.

For many of my displaced compatriots, the horror of ethnic cleansing continues as we speak. As a matter of policy, tens of thousands of them are being prevented from returning to their homes or what is left of their homes in the occupied territories. As Mr. Walter Kalin, the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, puts it in his report: “An estimated 37,600 ... will not be able to return in the foreseeable future” (A/HRC/10/13/Add.2, para. 58). This policy represents a third wave of ethnic cleansing, with the first two carried out in another occupied Georgian province, Abkhazia, where 400,000 citizens of the pre-war population of 550,000 were either killed or expelled — including, most recently, 3,000 men and women in the past year.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the issue. Here, I would like to draw the Council’s attention to the issue of the humanitarian blockade of the occupied territories, and to provide an update on the situation on the ground. It is a fact that the Russian occupying forces have been completely blocking access of humanitarian aid to the occupied territories, requiring humanitarian missions to enter the Tskhinvali region of South Ossetia exclusively via Russian territory. This policy represents yet another breach of the principles of international humanitarian law, as well as of paragraph 3 of the European Union-brokered ceasefire agreement. A number of international organizations have protested against that policy. The blockade turns the occupied territories into a black hole where people are deprived of their basic rights and humanitarian aid is simply not allowed.

No one will be surprised to learn that it is with the same lack of constructiveness that Russia has refused even to consider a compromise solution to the problem that envisaged allowing double and simultaneous access to the territories from both the northern and southern directions. It should be reiterated that the Government of Georgia, as well as the entire international community, regrets the termination of the activities of the United Nations Observation Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), due to the single — I emphasize single — Russian vote cast against it. This constitutes a clear violation of paragraph 4 of resolution 1866 (2009), which calls for “facilitating, and refraining from placing any impediment to, humanitarian assistance”.

The termination of UNOMIG’s mandate was meant to reduce the level of protection for human rights in occupied Abkhazia. It is also aimed at creating yet another obstacle to the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes, in contravention of a number of resolutions of this Council and the General Assembly. We are convinced that to better address these needs, we have to substantially enhance the presence of the relevant United Nations agencies — such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, among others — inside the occupied territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region of South Ossetia.

My Government joins the call to take this opportunity to reinvigorate our joint commitment to making the protection of civilians a reality for all those caught up in conflict.