

Security Council: Statement by Ambassador Berger on Protection of Civilians

Feb 12, 2013

(Security Council: Statement as delivered by Ambassador Berger in an Open Debate on Protection of Civilians)

"Thank you, Mr. President,

it is a pleasure to see you chair this high- level debate and the high number of delegations taking the floor shows how important it was to organise this open debate.

Germany aligns itself with the statements delivered by the European Union and by Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians. We welcome the Presidential Statement and the establishment of a standing reporting procedure.

Mr. President,

Many of us recall a photograph that went around the world very recently. It is that of a small boy walking down a street, directly staring at dozens of slaughtered men whose bodies were found in a river near Aleppo. This is just one example of the horrors that children continue to face each and every day in Syria and the psychological trauma that this war will have on a whole future generation.

The civil war in Syria is intensifying and as we heard from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the pain and suffering which it inflicts on the civilian population continues to increase in scale and scope. The war has moved into the major cities. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians, especially against women and children, often caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide impact in densely populated areas, remain the most appalling aspect of the Syrian conflict.

According to the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, the disproportionate and indiscriminate killing of children in the course of military operations may amount to war crimes.

In Syria, boys and girls are being bombarded in their neighbourhoods. And we recall that the Syrian uprising itself was triggered by children in Dara'a being subjected to torture, some of them for weeks.

Schools and hospitals must be zones of peace, where children are granted protection even in times of conflict, as stipulated in Resolution 1998. Yet, in Syria, the UN has documented Government attacks on schools and the denial of civilian access to hospitals. In some cases, also anti-government armed groups have targeted school buildings. During her recent visit to Syria in December 2012, the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict learned from the

Syrian Government that at least 1.300 school facilities have been damaged since the outbreak of violence.

In Syria we are also witnessing the devastating consequences that deliberate attacks against hospitals, health workers and ambulances have for the sick and wounded in general. All parties responsible for targeting medical personnel, punishing medical personnel for performing their duties and attacking or misusing the Geneva Conventions' emblems need to know that such acts constitute a war crime.

We remain convinced that accountability for such grave violations must be ensured. In this context, we wish to recall that States from all regions of the world have put before this Council a request to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Thank you, Mr President."