

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Ireland.

Ms. Anderson (Ireland): I should like to express our thanks to Austria for organizing this timely debate. Ireland associates itself with the intervention made earlier by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

It is customary on these anniversary occasions to note the progress made, as well as to map the distance to be travelled. We would not wish to devalue the efforts or achievements made over the past 10 years. There have indeed been advances. For example, one area in which my country has been particularly active is in the adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. But the Secretary-General, in his report of last May, tells it as it is:

“[F]or all the reports, resolutions and actions of the last decade, the situation that confronts civilians in current conflicts is depressingly similar to that which prevailed in 1999.” (*S/2009/277, para. 23*)

The frustration of those at the coalface is clear. In the Security Council’s last debate on the issue, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Holmes reminded us that lip service to the principles of international law is no substitute for real action. The New Horizon document acknowledges the significant credibility challenge for United Nations peacekeeping that is created by the mismatch between expectations and capacity. Those same sentiments and frustrations were echoed in the opening interventions this morning. We are not short of high quality analysis. We need now to move from analysis to action. Today, I would wish to concentrate on four points, the first on enhancing accountability.

The principles of enhancing compliance and accountability are ones that we believe need to be applied rigorously and consistently. We note what the Secretary-General’s report has to say in that regard, both in general and in relation to the specific situations he mentions: Sri Lanka, Gaza and Afghanistan. We agree with his recommendations, including his stress on the need for consistent condemnation of violations of the law by all parties to conflict without exception. All of us are challenged by that. In the week following the General Assembly’s debate on the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48), the challenge has been brought into particularly sharp relief.

Issues of protection of civilians can typically arise in a complex political context. We must be mindful of the complexity of the context but, at the same time, not be prepared to sacrifice or erode the principles of protection and accountability. That entails responsibilities both for those who frame resolutions and those who vote on them. The temptation to distort or to dilute the principles of protection must be avoided. Nor can we succumb to selectivity. Our concerns about specific situations gain legitimacy and respect insofar as we are prepared to insist that the same standards be applied universally.

Secondly, with regard to safeguarding humanitarian access, such access is the lifeline linking humanitarian actors to civilians in conflict. The increase in attacks on humanitarian workers — with the recent targeted attack on United Nations aid workers in Kabul being a further grim example — is putting that lifeline at risk. The statistics are shocking. The incidence of kidnapping of humanitarian workers has increased by 350 per cent in the past three years. Last year marked the greatest number of humanitarian workers affected by violence in 12 years.

We in Ireland have experienced at first hand the vulnerability of our international humanitarian workers. We were relieved by the recent release of Sharon Commins, a young Irish aid worker who was held captive with a Ugandan colleague in Darfur for some months. Efforts continue to secure the release of Father Michael Sinnott, on which we are working with the Philippine authorities.

The increased targeting of humanitarian workers is an affront to the United Nations most basic principles. More must be done, both to highlight and prioritize the issue and to strategize so as to arrest and reverse the trend. There is clearly no simple way to eliminate the threat. The approach will have to be multi-pronged, and any proposed steps must respect the need for humanitarian actors to maintain their neutrality and independence.

Where United Nations peacekeepers are on the ground, their role in protecting humanitarian workers can be critical. The Secretary-General's report refers to the role played by the European Union Force (EUFOR) in Chad in preventing criminality against the humanitarian community. Ireland provided the leadership for EUFOR and we continue to have a strong presence in the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad. As our personnel on the ground in those operations are acutely aware, it is only through the most thoroughly professional and impartial approach that the peacekeeping force can win the confidence of non-governmental organizations, and thus their assent to having peacekeepers help to protect them.

Thirdly, with regard to strengthening United Nations peacekeeping, this issue has been addressed in almost every intervention today. As speaker after speaker has recognized, our task now is to bridge the gap between aspiration and reality. If we needed a further wake-up call, the joint study recently issued by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs provides it. The study's central finding is that the chain of events to support the protection of civilians — from the earliest planning to Security Council mandates to the implementation of mandates in the field — is broken.

Two of the key issues are clarity of mandate and adequacy of resources. Mandates must be clear and specific. Inevitably, field commanders will face resource constraints and competing demands on the resources available, and will need to use their judgment on how best to deploy them to achieve maximum civilian protection. But guidance is required. The mandate of each peacekeeping operation should elaborate, as fully as possible, who is to be protected and what level of protection is to be provided. The means to achieve that should be fully set out in the operational plans and other directive material.

Peacekeeping missions seldom have sufficient resources to accomplish the protection task as they would wish. In almost all scenarios, but particularly where there is a need to protect civilians over a large area, air assets are critical. Their value is psychological and pre-emptive, as well as reactive. Where civilians are under threat, the belief that a force has the reach and combat power to react swiftly and decisively will be a considerable deterrent.

Fourthly and finally, with regard to the responsibility to protect, Ireland has participated actively in the evolution of the discussion on the responsibility to protect. We view it as an extremely important vehicle for advancing the work on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Resolution 63/308, adopted by the General Assembly in September, was very welcome. However, like many others, we would have preferred a text that more clearly mapped out the future development of the work. The reference to the responsibility to protect in resolution 1894 (2009), adopted today, undoubtedly will help to reinvigorate efforts.

The test of success for today's debate will be whether it moves us beyond analysis and consciousness-raising to more concrete outcomes. The message from the coalface — that actions must match words, that all of us must demonstrate a much greater sense of urgency, and that Security Council members must exercise the responsibilities that accompany the privileges of membership — must be heeded.