



IRELAND

Statement by

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Permanent Representative

**AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY
COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON PROTECTION
OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT**

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Mr. President,

Our thanks to Austria for organising this timely debate.

It is customary on these anniversary occasions to note the progress made, as well as mapping the distance to be travelled. We would not wish to devalue the efforts or achievements over the past ten years. There have indeed been advances: for example, one area where 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: ...“For 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”.

The frustration of those at the coal face is clear. In the Security Council’s last debate on the issue, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs reminded us that “Lip service to the principles of international law is no substitute for real action”. The New Horizons document acknowledges the significant credibility challenge for UN Peacekeeping that is created by the mismatch between expectations and capacity.

We are not short of high quality analysis. The Secretary-General’s Report (S/2009/277) and the Austrian Concept Paper provide us with lucid and focussed inputs. The main areas of challenge are clearly outlined: enhancing compliance by State and non-State actors, protection of civilians by UN peacekeeping operations, safeguarding humanitarian access, enhancing accountability.

We need now to move from analysis to action. Today, I would wish to concentrate on four points.

(i) **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 this regard, both in general and in relation to the specific situations he mentions: Sri Lanka, Gaza, Afghanistan. We agree with his recommendations, including his urging of the need for consistent condemnation of violations of the law by all parties to conflict, without exception.

All of us are challenged by this. In the week following the General Assembly’s debate on the Goldstone Report, the challenge is 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. This 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 are applied universally.

(ii) **Safeguarding Humanitarian Access**

Humanitarian access is the lifeline linking humanitarian actors to civilians in conflict. The increase in attacks on humanitarian workers – with the recent targeted attack on UN 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% in the past three years. Last year, 2008, marked the greatest number of humanitarian workers affected by violence in twelve 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, held captive with a Ugandan colleague in Darfur for some months. Efforts continue to secure the release of Fr. Michael Sinnott, on which we are working with the Philippine authorities.

This increased targeting of humanitarian workers is an affront to the UN's most basic principles. More must be done both to highlight and prioritise the issue and to strategise 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 UN 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 EUFOR in Chad in preventing criminality against the humanitarian community. Ireland provided the leadership of EUFOR and we continue to have a strong presence in MINURCAT. As our personnel on the ground in these operations are acutely aware, it is only through the most thoroughly professional and impartial approach that the peacekeeping force can win the confidence of NGOs, and thus their assent to having peacekeepers help to protect them.

(iii) **Strengthening UN Peacekeeping**

The integration of protection activities in the mandates of peacekeeping missions marked an important breakthrough in the efforts to improve protection of civilians in conflict areas.

Our task now is to bridge the gap between aspiration and reality. Ireland welcomes the attention being paid to this task, including in the 'New Horizons' Document and the joint DPKO/OCHA study launched earlier this week.

If we needed a further wake-up call, the joint DPKO/OCHA study provides it. Its central finding is that the chain of events to support 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 judgement on how best to deploy these to achieve maximum civilian protection. However, guidance is required: the mandate for each peacekeeping operation should elaborate as fully as possible who is to be protected and what level of protection is to be provided, and the means to achieve this should be fully set out in the operation 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.

(iv) **Responsibility to Protect**

Ireland has participated actively in the evolution of the discussion on responsibility to protect. We view it as an extremely important vehicle for advancing the work on protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The resolution adopted in the General Assembly in September was very welcome; however, like many others, we would have preferred a text which more clearly mapped out the future development of the work. We hope that one of the outcomes of today's debate will be to give renewed impetus to the elaboration and application of this key concept. The reference to Responsibility to Protect in today's resolution undoubtedly will help to reinvigorate efforts.

Mr. President,

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 coal face must be heeded: 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.