

Security Council - Open debate on protection of civilians in armed conflict - Statement by the Permanent Representative of Italy H.E. Ambassador Cesare Maria Ragaglini (November 11, 2009)

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Mr. President, I wish to thank you for taking the initiative of convening today's high level debate on this important anniversary and for your delegation's important work in negotiating Resolution 1894 that was adopted earlier today. Italy was glad to join the co-sponsor's list. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for providing a complete picture of the progress achieved and of ongoing concerns in the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by Sweden on behalf of the European Union. I will touch on points of particular interest to my Country: Ending sexual violence in situations of armed conflict is a key element in the protection of civilians' agenda. The Security Council has shown great leadership in this regard in the last year and a half, starting with the approval of landmark Resolution 1820 that stated once and for all that sexual violence, when used as a tactic of war, is a matter of peace and security and therefore the business of this Council. Security Council Resolution 1888, adopted last September, is another important step forward, providing the Council with effective new tools to end impunity and to hold accountable the perpetrators of these heinous crimes. It is now up to the Council to use these tools and implement these resolutions in full and without delay. In this respect, the Secretary-General's early appointment of a Special Representative for "women, peace and security" will provide much needed leadership, coordination and advocacy in this field. Mr. President, turning to peacekeeping, the protection of civilians by UN Blue Helmets in our opinion requires three elements: - Guidelines, by which I mean the instructions and principles that should inform the peacekeepers' action on the ground when civilian lives are at risk. In this respect, we encourage the Secretariat's efforts to achieve a policy that is shared by Member States in the next few months; - Training should be standardized and based on these guidelines. It should include the ability to manage crisis situations involving a risk to the lives of civilians, particularly women and children. Italy is cooperating with the Secretariat in this sector through its Centers for Excellence. In this spirit, it has helped to finance some Police Division projects; - Equipment. Guidelines and training should be accompanied by resources that enable peacekeepers to protect civilians effectively and securely. Mr. President, I would also like to recall Italy's commitment to combating impunity for international crimes. In situations where any civilian population is the target of attacks, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provides the legal basis for holding accountable those responsible for the attacks if a State is unwilling or unable to do so. In this regard, we must reiterate our commitment to end impunity. International criminal jurisdiction should thus be viewed increasingly as a complementary instrument in the repression of international crimes. It is the States, by adapting their laws and jurisdictions, that should be the first to respond to serious breaches of law such as war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in their territories. At the same time it is up to States – through collaboration with the ICRC and other institutions competent in the field – to raise awareness of the basic principles and the importance of international humanitarian law, especially in the armed forces. Mr. President, allow me to conclude on a more general note by recalling the reaffirmation in Resolution 1674 of the principle of the responsibility to protect, a cardinal achievement of the United Nations and welcoming the reference to this principle in the Resolution that was adopted by the Council today. This principle implies that sovereignty brings special responsibilities – Governments must protect their own populations and the best way for them to do so is to promote human rights, rule of law and democratic governance. Only when a Government manifestly fails to do so should the international community intervene. The responsibility to protect should not be perceived in a confrontational manner; it should be seen instead as an instrument available to the international community to overcome crises, provided that the conditions referred to in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the Summit Outcome Document are met. In this framework, we welcome the debate that took place in the General Assembly last July on the report of the Secretary-General and look forward to its follow up in the current session. Thank you, Mr. President.