

Mr. Cornado (Italy): Thank you, Mr. President, for taking the initiative of convening this debate. Let me also express my appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his thorough briefing on the progress achieved and on ongoing concerns regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We endorse the five core challenges approach referred to in the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/277).

Italy fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. I will touch on points of particular interest to my Government, keeping in mind my country's recent experience as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

Italy is proud to have been one of the sponsors of resolution 1820 (2008), to whose drafting we actively contributed. Sexual violence as a tactic of war has emerged as one of the foremost threats to the civilian population in recent conflicts. Women and children bear the main brunt of that horrific practice. With resolution 1820 (2008), the Council stated loud and clear that this is a matter of international peace and security to which the utmost attention must be paid. Parties to conflict must immediately and effectively put an end to sexual violence and take special measures to protect women and children from it. Impunity must cease and those responsible must be held accountable.

We look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report pursuant to resolution 1820 (2008). We will read it with attention and will consider its recommendations, and we hope very much that the Council will act upon them to make further progress in protecting women and children.

Whenever a peacekeeping operation is in place, civilians expect to be protected by United Nations forces. When that task is not fulfilled, the Organization's credibility is at stake. Failure to prevent civilian casualties and to ensure the safe return of refugees and the protection of children could engender mistrust and disappointment, and could ultimately put peacekeeping missions at risk. That is another reason why the protection of civilians should continue to be part of peacekeeping mandates and why peacekeepers should be properly trained and equipped.

The ongoing review of the peacekeeping doctrine is taking those developments into account. The concept of robust peacekeeping is now spreading through international seminars, the Secretariat's assessments and Security Council debates. Yet, as the Secretary-General's report highlights, the protection of civilians is not only a military task; it is a more inclusive challenge. Every component of a peacekeeping mission — military, police, civil, gender, human rights and child protection — has to contribute to achieving the protection goals.

During Italy's recent term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, we supported the inclusion of civilian protection clauses in peacekeeping mandates. We did not stop there. Together with the United Nations, the Italian Government hosted a symposium on child protection in armed conflict in Rome three days ago. As the Italian Foreign Minister stated on that occasion, the ultimate goal is to spread awareness among the international community on the impact of armed conflict on civilians, especially children. As a concrete result of the event, joint training initiatives in this field are being considered by the Italian Government and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Just as peacekeeping operations require instruments that are not only military in nature, international criminal jurisdiction should be viewed increasingly as a complementary instrument in the suppression of international crimes. It is States that, by adapting their laws and jurisdictions, 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 International Committee of the Red Cross 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.

We are convinced that the protection of civilians requires further efforts to prevent the destabilizing accumulation of conventional weapons and to minimize their humanitarian impact as much as possible. Italy is therefore at the forefront of the fight against the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons and is actively engaged in the United Nations process towards

a legally binding arms trade treaty establishing international standards — including the respect for international humanitarian law and human rights — for transfers of conventional weapons.

Italy also strongly supports universal adherence to and full implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons — in particular its Protocol V, on explosive remnants of war — as well as the early entry into force of the Convention banning the cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

I would like to conclude on a more general note by recalling the reaffirmation by resolution 1674 (2006) of the principle of the responsibility to protect, a cardinal achievement of the United Nations. That 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, the rule of law and democratic governance. Only when a Government is unable or unwilling 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 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1) are met.

Within that framework, the debate on the report of the Secretary-General will be a timely opportunity to build on the consensus achieved at the 2005 World Summit and concretely implement the responsibility to protect. Italy intends to actively participate in that debate.