

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for preparing his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2009/277). I am also deeply grateful to Under-Secretary-General John Holmes for his briefing.

Substantial progress has been made on the protection of civilians in armed conflict since the first debate of the Council on this subject 10 years ago. The Council has since produced a number of well-established normative frameworks, including one that was laid out in resolution 1674 (2006). As a result, awareness has been raised among Member States and the Council has adopted a growing number of decisions related to this issue to advance the cause in country-specific deliberations.

We welcome the recently adopted practice of convening a meeting of the Security Council Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians to receive a briefing from the Secretariat on up-to-date and detailed information on the protection of civilians prior to consultations on the mandates of specific peacekeeping missions. All Council members should take full advantage of these briefings.

What is most important now is to put those established normative frameworks into practice. Despite the progress to date, we have grave concerns about ongoing civilian casualties all over the world, be they civilians, journalists or humanitarian workers. We cannot accept child soldiers, sexual violence or any of the other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that take place somewhere in the world every day. We have to redouble our efforts. Today, I would like to highlight three points.

First of all, we should emphasize that it is States that have the primary responsibility to enhance compliance with international law and to protect civilians. At the same time, we need to address the serious impact that non-State groups are having. We are appalled by the use of civilians as human shields by, for instance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and deliberate attacks on civilians by the Lord's Resistance Army. Non-State armed groups often deliberately use civilians to attain their political and military ends, and fighting inevitably produces civilian casualties.

It is essential to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law by non-State actors as well. We believe that the protection of civilians should be a priority in any conflict situation, be it a civil war or an anti-terrorist operation. At the same time, we recognize the legitimate right of sovereign Governments to combat illegal armed groups and terrorist organizations.

It is not always easy to attain the two objectives at the same time: on one hand, to fight against a rebel group or terrorist organization and, on the other, to protect civilians and minimize casualties. But both objectives must be pursued simultaneously to the fullest extent. The international community, in particular the Security Council, needs to discuss in depth how to achieve both objectives and, particularly, how to ensure humanitarian access and compliance with international humanitarian law by non-State armed groups. There are suggestions in the report of the Secretary-General, and we can start from there.

The second issue is the mandate of peacekeeping operations. Protecting civilians is an effective way to contribute to social stability and prevent the recurrence of a conflict. The Council has therefore mandated many peacekeeping operations to protect civilians.

However, as the report makes clear, a substantial gap exists between the high expectations placed on a mission to carry out the mandate when the Security Council takes a decision and the actual implementation on the ground of those mandates. The Council needs to address this discrepancy in all its aspects, including mandate formation, mission planning, human and financial resources, necessary equipment, standards of operation and rules of engagement.

The Working Group of the Whole on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, under my chairmanship, has committed to address these issues through discussions with troop-contributing countries, police-contributing countries, major financial contributing countries and other major stakeholders. The Working Group will make every effort to formulate concrete measures that will facilitate improving operational capacity to implement complex mandates. I urge members to extend their full cooperation so that the Group may complete its task on time.

The independent study on the protection of civilians commissioned in the Secretariat by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will also attempt to address these issues, and we look forward to its findings.

The third point is the human security perspective. I would like to emphasize how important it is for the protection of civilians that we work to empower individuals and communities to prevent the recurrence of a conflict. Empowerment is vitally important if vulnerable people, such as refugees and internally displaced persons, are to be able to stand on their feet again and begin to rebuild their lives.

Empowerment is at the very core of human security, which the Friends of Human Security, under the co-chairmanships of Mexico and Japan, have been promoting. I am very grateful for the commitment of Ambassador Heller on this. Appropriate assistance for empowerment, such as income-generating activities, education and health services, are key components in protecting civilians and ensuring human security.

Through the Friends of Human Security, we will continue to make every effort to operationalize this approach in the activities of the United Nations. We believe that doing so will provide added value so that civilians are properly protected irrespective of their legal status when they find themselves caught in the midst of conflict.

In conclusion, Japan supports the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General. We attach importance to the briefings of the Expert Group and to applying the revised aide-memoire to review mission standards. It is my conviction that we should measure the progress in meeting our common challenge not by the number of documents or analyses that we prepare, but by the number of lives we can save and the people we protect on the ground. The Security Council is responsible for considering specific action based on the information and recommendations presented to us. The Council must monitor closely and ensure the implementation of any decision it has taken. To that end, we are ready to consult with other Member States and the Secretariat.