

Mr. Dabbashi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to thank the delegation of Austria for having organized this important meeting and to thank you personally, Sir, for presiding over it. I wish also to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General for his presence among us and for his important contribution to the debate. Nor can I fail to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights for their statements.

Participants at the 2005 World Summit endorsed the principle of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The Security Council's deliberations and its relevant resolutions, including resolution 1674 (2006), helped to establish a framework incorporating measures on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Those measures were intended to enhance the implementation on the ground of the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

But in spite of the substantial progress achieved in the sphere of the codification of international humanitarian law and in spite of the endorsement of the general principles of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the tangible results in terms of implementation have not yet reached the target. This frequently creates frustration because of the great divergence between principle and action.

The number of victims of armed conflict, including victims of foreign occupation, has not decreased. The suffering of victims has increased. This suffering includes torture and other forms of inhumane treatment such as gender-based and sexual violence, violence against children, the recruitment of child soldiers, trafficking in persons, displacement and the deliberate denial of access to international assistance.

We continue to live in a world in which States and groups wilfully and wantonly target civilians or adopt strategies that they know have the potential to result in the killing of civilians. Here, we note that wars have been and continue to be waged on the pretext of fighting terrorism or self-defence. In most such wars, principles and norms of international humanitarian law have not been heeded. The majority of casualties in these wars have been civilians. That is true in particular of Israel's repeated acts of aggression against Lebanon, the war in Iraq and the invasion of Afghanistan. Nor must we forget the victims of local conflicts.

The Somali people have been subject to killings, displacement, exile as refugees, hunger and threats and have been deprived of their fundamental rights. In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, civilians continue to suffer as a result of the conflict and daily violations of their rights. In Darfur and in eastern Chad, civilians continue to fall victim to tribal conflicts and regional disputes. That list is far from exhaustive, and everybody knows it.

The Palestinian people continue to suffer the harshest and most inhumane treatment under Israeli occupation. In the Gaza Strip, the most basic needs of more than 1.5 million Palestinians continue to be neglected. They are being denied access to humanitarian

assistance — even assistance provided under the supervision of the United Nations, which cannot reach them in a timely manner. The Gaza Strip has become a huge prison, with entry and exit still being obstructed. That is unprecedented in human history.

But the Israeli occupation authorities were not satisfied with the situation and launched a flagrant 22- day act of aggression against the Gaza Strip, employing every means of mass destruction, including internationally prohibited weapons such as white phosphorus. The attacks spared no one and did not distinguish between civilians and members of the military. They wantonly targeted civilians, civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools and United Nations property and facilities. The result is known to all and has been set out in trustworthy international reports that are beyond question.

In fact, we cannot understand how the Security Council can remain silent, and how it can fail to move immediately to prosecute Israeli perpetrators of war crimes, in particular the crimes in Gaza. These are very well documented and have been set out in the report of the fact-finding body established by the Secretary- General to investigate damage to United Nations property in Gaza, as well in the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Israeli aggression in Gaza, chaired by Justice Richard Goldstone (see A/HRC/12/48). The General Assembly has considered the latter report and endorsed its recommendations; it has called on the Security Council to adopt measures on war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces against civilians in Gaza. We hope that, ultimately, the support of some Council members for Israel will not block the Council's attempts to shoulder its responsibilities. We hope that Israel will cease to be an untouchable entity that is above the law.

Thousands of Palestinians were mercilessly killed or wounded in full view of the international community. Internationally prohibited weapons were used against Palestinians, and the infrastructure of Gaza was almost completely destroyed. For justice to prevail, the perpetrators of these crimes must be prosecuted. The Security Council must complement the role of the General Assembly so that its deliberations on the protection of civilians can be meaningful and so that the Council can regain its credibility.

When it adopted resolution 1674 (2006), the Security Council was very clear about the need to provide unobstructed humanitarian assistance to those in need. The Council must adopt an unwavering position on the provision of international humanitarian assistance and on meeting the basic needs of those requiring assistance. For that reason the Council must pressure the Israeli occupation authorities to lift their siege on Gaza, enabling people, goods and money to move freely, so that the basic needs of those under siege are met.

Some countries take the high moral ground when they preach at us in the Security Council about the protection of civilians. But those countries do nothing to protect Palestinians from Israeli terror or from Israel's systematic crimes against the Palestinian people, even though it is within their power to put an end to them. These countries compete to provide the weapons that the Israeli entity uses to kill and mutilate

Palestinians. Moreover, they claim to be committed to Israel's so-called security, which certainly includes the security of the Israeli occupation in occupied Arab territories. This undoubtedly complicates the lives of Palestinian and Arab citizens who can find no explanation for this blind support for Israel's behaviour.

The issue of protecting civilians in armed conflict should be addressed comprehensively and in a context that includes prevention, motivation, rationales and outcomes. We would stress, first, that the Council must place greater priority on preventing the outbreak or exacerbation of conflicts. To that end, international efforts must be coordinated to combat hunger and poverty and to redress the injustices inflicted on many peoples. The activation of preventive diplomacy and early warning mechanisms would do much to prevent the outbreak and exacerbation of conflicts. Secondly, pursuant to resolution 1674 (2006), the protection of civilians should be a core priority of United Nations peacekeeping operations, which should be endowed with the means necessary to that end. Thirdly, when the Security Council acts to guarantee the protection of civilians, its actions should be balanced and transparent, avoid double standards and be supported by a system of accountability and sanctions that serves as a deterrent to all without distinction.

We hope that our debate will result in coordinated action commensurate with the importance of the issue under discussion, which touches first and foremost on the dignity of humankind.