

Statement by Morocco at the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council

Protection of Civilians

12 February 2014

(Unofficial Transcript)

My delegation welcomes the holding, under your presidency, Madam President, of this debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the adoption of a new presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/3) to reinforce the legal arsenal resulting from the Council's work in this field. The Security Council addresses this important issue on a regular basis, and that is, sadly, entirely justified, given the turbulent international environment, which is of concern to us all. Moreover, the relevance of this debate was aptly reflected in the briefings this morning by Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The picture painted in the tenth report of the Secretary-General shows that the current state of the protection of civilians "does not give much cause for optimism" (*S/2013/689, para. 8*). Civilians in many parts of the world continue to suffer the tragic and devastating consequences of armed conflict and are regularly targeted during attacks and indiscriminate reprisals committed in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The tragic events in the Central African Republic are the most recent reminder of the heavy toll paid by civilians, in particular women and children, in the armed conflicts imposed on them. To avoid violence and vengeful acts, civilians are often obliged to flee or seek refuge in neighbouring countries, with all the consequences that can have for the physical and mental health of those vulnerable people.

We welcome the progress made by the international community in protecting civilians who have been held hostage by conflicts, and we are pleased to take part in those efforts within the various peacekeeping operations of the United Nations.

The deadly nature of conflicts and the sophistication of the weapons used in them endangers not only civilian populations but also humanitarian workers and journalists, who are often caught in the crossfire between the warring sides and prevented from carrying out their noble mission of assisting civilians exposed to armed conflict and make their plight known. In that respect, I would like to reiterate our condemnation of acts of aggression and intimidation perpetrated against humanitarian personnel and to pay due tribute to the who are carrying out their tasks in often very difficult conditions, sometimes risking their very lives.

While the protection of civilians is one of the major concerns of peacekeeping operations that have a mandate to that end, the success of that humanitarian task is dependent on coordination with the host country, which has, as has been stated many times in this debate, the primary responsibility to protect its own civilians. Success also depends on the mission's mandate being in line with the resources at its disposal to prevent possible atrocities against civilians and to guarantee optimal protection for them in times of conflict.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict also requires a comprehensive approach that reflects the multidimensional legal, humanitarian and security aspects. There must be a clear division of the mandates and roles entrusted to the various stakeholders operating in complex situations and effective coordination between the stakeholders.

Moreover, the protection of civilians in the framework of peacekeeping operations mandated to that end requires a periodic assessment of the implementation process for those strategies with a view to identifying gaps and shortcomings and learning positive lessons that can improve the implementation of such strategies.

Finally, the protection of civilians must go hand-in-hand with the fight against trafficking in weapons and their proliferation and ensuring respect for arms embargoes, when those are put in place by the Security Council.

As also stated many times in this debate, humanitarian work for the protection of civilians must be clearly dissociated from political goals and protected from becoming an instrument of any of the parties to the conflict.

In his report, the Secretary-General rightly stresses that humanitarian operations are often hindered by host country restrictions on the freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel and refugees seeking assistance and protection. The presence of non-State armed groups in refugee camps, in violation of the fundamental principles enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the infiltration by armed elements of those populations make the implementation of any refugee protection strategy an illusion and is a challenge that needs to be dealt with. The duty to protect those vulnerable populations requires that they be guarded from any act of violence or intimidation and that their freedom of movement be guaranteed. The protection of civilians requires, of course, greater respect for international law, international humanitarian law and refugee rights by all stakeholders. However, while much progress has been made at the normative level, much remains to be done on the ground and in practice to ensure the effective implementation of commitments undertaken in that field.

In conclusion, we should stress the importance of the preventive aspect of the protection of civilians as it enhances the capacities of the countries concerned and the rule of law, guarantees good governance, lays the basis for a culture of human rights and helps in the implementation of early-warning mechanisms able to detect pre-conflict situations and prevent them from turning into open and deadly conflicts.