

Ms. Graham (New Zealand): I thank you for convening this debate, Mr. President. We welcome the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2009/277), which provides a thorough assessment of the first 10 years of Council involvement in the protection of civilians and highlights the challenges that Member States must still address to ensure better protection for them. We commend the Council for its ongoing consideration of this issue and we especially thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

The immediacy of the need to protect civilians is evident from the new and ongoing conflicts around the world. Sadly, we continue to see civilians suffering seriously and disproportionately, even in the short time since the last debate on this subject in January.

The 26-year conflict in Sri Lanka has cost the lives of many of its people and led to a serious humanitarian crisis. New Zealand joined with others in condemning Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam attacks on the civilian population, its forced recruitment of soldiers, including, reportedly, children, and its use of civilians as human shields. At the same time, New Zealand was very concerned by reports of Sri Lankan Government forces using heavy artillery in areas with a dense civilian population.

While the fighting is now over, we remain deeply concerned about the plight and safety of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled that conflict. We join other countries in urging the Government of Sri Lanka to improve access to the IDP camps for humanitarian agencies in order to ensure that all those affected by the conflict receive the assistance that they so urgently need.

The Secretary-General's report illustrates that there is still much work to be done to ensure the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict. In this regard, there are three thematic areas which New Zealand would like to cover.

First, with respect to peacekeeping mandates, New Zealand strongly supports the inclusion of civilian protection activities in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations. This approach is an important and evolving practice of recent years and one means for the United Nations to help address the serious problem of civilian casualties in armed conflict. Paragraph 16 of resolution 1674 (2006) was an important step in this regard, as were paragraphs 125 through 128 of the report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the latter of which reflected important agreement by Member States relating to the protection of civilians.

However, improvements need to be made in the clarity and specificity of these mandates, in order that all parties — the Council, peacekeepers and civilians — may have a common understanding and shared expectations. Little progress has been made towards developing the necessary capacities and doctrines that need to accompany protection of civilians mandates in order for them to be effectively implemented. Like others who have spoken, we encourage the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to address this as a matter of priority and we look forward to the findings of the independent study commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and DPKO.

Secondly, with regard to the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers, the increasing incidence of intentional attacks on humanitarian workers in conflict zones is deeply disturbing. In addition to threatening the safety of these unarmed civilian workers, the attacks constrain the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, including that offered by the United Nations. New Zealand welcomes the Secretary-General's strong recommendations in this regard, and we look to the Security Council to assist in their implementation.

New Zealand urges parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law, in particular the duty to respect and protect humanitarian assistance personnel. A related concern for New Zealand is the rising frequency of attacks on journalists and members of the media in conflict areas. Journalists have an important role to play in the monitoring of conflicts and in ending impunity for serious crimes.

Thirdly, it is imperative for the protection of civilians that impunity be ended for those who attack civilians and humanitarian workers. Impunity allows those responsible not to be held to account for their actions, denies justice to the victims of these actions and their families,

and sends the message that the international community is not prepared to take action even when serious crimes occur.

New Zealand supports the International Criminal Court, which has an important role to play in bringing the perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide to justice. We have worked closely with others to encourage widespread ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute. It is in the interests of all States that there be accountability. We urge all countries that have not yet done so to become party to the Rome Statute and to take steps within their own jurisdictions to combat impunity.

In conclusion, New Zealand recognizes the critical importance of the protection of civilians agenda, and we welcome the Secretary-General's recommendations in his latest report. New Zealand stands ready to work with other Member States, the Council and the Secretariat to ensure that progress in protection of civilians becomes a reality for those on the ground.