

I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

**Mrs. Ogwu** (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation appreciates your initiative, Mr. President, in convening this open and timely debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General John Holmes for his lucid briefing and relevant comments this morning.

We believe that the protection of civilians in armed conflict remains a daunting challenge and a matter of deep concern for all nations. In today's world, the grim reality is that civilians have not only become the casualties of brutal conflicts, but also the direct targets of dubious military tactics such as abductions, suicide attacks, sexual violence and denial of humanitarian access. Nigeria is concerned that those situations still exist in spite of numerous international laws protecting civilians.

Equally distressing is the fact that women, children, the aged and other vulnerable groups, who are least responsible for perpetuating conflicts, inevitably suffer most from their adverse social and economic consequences. Even more heinous, journalists and humanitarian aid workers, whose services are vital to the well-being of refugees and internally displaced persons, are also targeted, maimed and often killed.

Nigeria unequivocally condemns all acts of violence either targeted at or perpetrated against non-combatants by the protagonists in conflict. In particular, we condemn sexual violence against women in all its forms, the recruitment and deployment of child soldiers and the culture of impunity.

Nigeria believes that the responsibility to protect civilians in armed conflict situations is a shared one, although it lies primarily with national Governments. Protection requires early intervention and rapid deployment of humanitarian assistance by the international community. It also requires systematic coordination and the pulling together of the capacities of various humanitarian agencies involved in efforts to bring relief to internally displaced persons and refugees. More significantly, it requires humanitarian access to rebel-held territories, so that civilians can obtain the needed assistance.

Other measures required to stem conflict and to deal with its consequences include the ratification and implementation of existing conventions and protocols on armed conflict. Efforts should be intensified to strengthen the International Criminal Court and other legal frameworks and mechanisms for monitoring and reporting attacks against civilians by both State and non-State actors. Indeed, the international community should take vigorous and concerted action to combat genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes committed against unarmed civilians.

Conflict prevention, the rule of law and good governance are fundamental to the protection of civilians. Experience has demonstrated that it costs less to prevent than to control conflicts. That is why Nigeria is fully engaged in regional and subregional initiatives to prevent conflict. We stand firmly by regional initiatives such as the New Partnership for African's Development and the African Union peace and security mechanism. At the subregional level, we have steadily coordinated initiatives with other States members of the Economic Community of West African States to implement the Community's evolving security architecture.

Consequently, Nigeria calls for more international support for those regional and subregional organizations in order to strengthen their capacities through increased financial and technical assistance. Such support and assistance are necessary, since those organizations now bear most of the peacekeeping responsibilities on the continent.

In addition, we call on the international community to intensify its post-conflict peacebuilding efforts through the Peacebuilding Commission. Peacebuilding strategies should address short-term measures such as rehabilitating educational and health-care systems and laying the foundation for growth and long-term development.

The deliberate targeting of civilians and other protected persons in situations of armed conflict constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Hence, it is an issue within the remit of this Council. However, it is only when we collectively muster the political will and common cause to act in unity that we can truly hope to establish a viable practice for the

protection of civilians in conflict. Nigeria therefore invites Governments, the private sector, civil society and the international community to fully commit themselves to their obligations.