

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

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

12 February 2014

(Unofficial Transcript)

Excelencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will now be speaking in my national capacity. Lithuania aligns itself with the statement to be made by a representative of the EU Delegation.

In 1999 the Security Council took a unanimous decision to address systematically the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

15 years later, the gap between the normative base and implementation remains considerable as civilians continue to suffer from conflict-related violence, increasingly intentional and brutal.

Peacekeepers can assist the host state - but they are no substitute for the state.

The primary responsibility to protect civilians rests with the national governments.

In some cases, as in CAR or South Sudan, state institutions are too weak to carry out their responsibility to protect. In others- like Syria- the state itself is a perpetrator.

Inevitably, the issue of how best to design and implement protection mandates, and what works and why in any specific situation must be addressed.

We welcome the approach taken by the DPKO in its Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians, which encompasses three tiers of protection: support to political processes, protecting from physical violence, and establishing a protective environment.

We believe that protection mandates should involve a broad range of activities, including but not limited to, ensuring respect of international human rights and humanitarian law, facilitating humanitarian access, return of refugees and displaced persons, human rights monitoring, women

and child protection, and addressing sexual violence in conflict. Furthermore, implementing protection mandates and preparing protection strategies require improved situational awareness and analysis.

Relevant data and recommendations on the protection of civilians need to be systematically included in country- specific reports by the Secretariat.

Interaction and better flow of information among missions, humanitarian actors and local populations are also crucial.

In particular, humanitarian and human rights actors can contribute effectively to a realistic assessment of the threats and risks to the population on the ground.

Furthermore, implementation of protection mandates requires adequate resources, structures, and training.

Military, police and civilian personnel should receive relevant pre-deployment guidance and training.

Having a pool of experts available on short notice through standing capacities or rosters is helpful for early planning or filling in critical gaps.

We welcome the drafting by the Office of Military Affairs of baseline guidance on the protection of civilians for the military component; development of a mobile training teams project; as well as DPKO core predeployment training on child protection.

Mission leadership is crucial as it must ensure that protection is considered a priority across the whole mission.

We would also like to stress the importance of sharing among the missions of effective protection practices.

UNMISS for example established an early warning system that enabled better protection of rural populations.

UNAMA keeps a civilian casualty tracking system which, combined with tactical directives focused on civilian protection, is helping to reduce civilian casualty rates. Unmanned aerial systems observing Kivu and border zones contribute to enhancing MONUSCO's capacity to respond.

Adequate resources, training and mandate definition are just one side of the story in the context of PoC.

Peacekeepers cannot ensure protection of civilians in an environment where lawlessness and impunity prevail.

Strengthening the rule of law and building local justice mechanisms and judicial capacities to tackle impunity constitute an important part of protection efforts.

Ensuring accountability is an important deterrent in itself, and thus a contributing factor to the success in protecting civilians.

International justice mechanisms, such as mixed and special tribunals, the International Criminal Court as well as sanctions regimes have an important role to play in this regard. The Council must place a special emphasis on ending to impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights.

Perpetrators of those crimes, as well as those who attack and kill humanitarian and medical workers, journalists, and peacekeepers must know that there is no escaping justice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions - the foundation of protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Let me also note that today is the international day against the use of child soldiers. Perpetrators against their will, such children are also tragic victims of conflict.

It is incumbent upon the Council to make sure that those children as well as the countless civilians who continue to suffer conflict-related atrocities are guaranteed the protection they need.

My delegation supports the recommendations contained in UNSG's reports. The urgency of implementation cannot be stressed enough. Bridging the gap between the normative basis and concrete actions on the ground is paramount to saving lives.

I thank you.