

Statement by Rwanda on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Wednesday, 11 November 2009

My delegation welcomes the opportunity to participate in this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and wishes to express our gratitude to the delegation of Austria for convening this debate on an issue of critical importance to the maintenance of international peace and security.

We welcome the adoption this morning of resolution 1894 (2009) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and view it as an important step forward in our consideration of this issue. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their most insightful statements and for their efforts in this respect.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Zambia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Group, respectively.

It has been 10 years since the Security Council first discussed the protection of civilians in armed conflict, yet civilians still bear the brunt of the suffering in situations of armed conflict. It is increasingly clear that resolutions do not automatically translate into clear mandates and operations on the ground. In our region particularly, we experience daily the consequences of a failure to tackle the underlying causes of conflict and to fully implement protection mandates, due to either their ambiguous nature or a lack of capacity.

We therefore welcome the study recently published by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on protecting civilians in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations. As a troop-contributing country, we hope that it will lead the way in bringing clarity to protection mandates, in bridging existing gaps and in the implementation of its recommendations.

The genocide in Rwanda and the consequent conflict in the Great Lakes region have been characterized by a culture of impunity that has allowed the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and other genocidal forces to fester and commit heinous crimes against civilians in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We would encourage Operation Kimia II, supported by the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to maintain its efforts aimed at eliminating the threat to civilians posed mainly by the FDLR and other negative forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is imperative that we end the culture of impunity and ensure that all who commit such crimes are held accountable for their actions.

In conclusion, we view the responsibility to protect as being integral to the protection of civilians, and welcome the reference to the responsibility to protect in the resolution adopted this morning. The General Assembly debate and resolution 63/308 on the responsibility to protect make it necessary for this concept to be operationalized as an additional element in the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.