

**Statement by H.E. Sergey Karev, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the
United Nations
Open debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
United Nations Security Council
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(Delivered in Russian; translation taken from United Nations)

We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Ms. Amos, Mr. Šimonović and Mr. Spoerri for their briefings. The issue before us today remains extremely relevant in view of the difficult situation that prevails with respect to the protection of civilians in many of the world's hot spots. Despite the efforts of the international community and the presence of a significant international legal basis for the protection of civilians, thousands of people continue to die in conflicts. What is particularly troubling is that the majority of them are children, women and the elderly — in other words, those considered to be the most vulnerable groups in the population. We vehemently condemn deliberate attacks on civilians and their deaths as the result of indiscriminate or disproportionate use of force.

We believe that unswerving respect on the part of parties to an armed conflict for their commitments under international humanitarian law is a guarantee for the effective protection of civilians. However, that does not mean we have to dream up any new international legal or political concepts to bridge the supposed gaps in the protection regime of the Geneva conventions.

In particular, we question the wisdom of proposals to designate new categories of persons requiring special protection under international humanitarian law. Such ideas can in practice only weaken protection already afforded to civilians.

To the same degree, we are alarmed at the tendency to subjective interpretation of the standards of international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the tendency to equate those norms with the highly ambiguous concept of the responsibility to protect. Practice has shown that invoking that concept with what initially appeared to be noble goals often leads to interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States and to violent regime change.

In that respect, we reiterate that the priority for the protection of civilians in armed conflict should be the understanding that primary responsibility in that sphere lies with the belligerents, while the international institutions and mechanisms should perform a subsidiary role, assisting national efforts in that area.

Today, there is no single set of criteria for assessing the effectiveness of implementation by the belligerents of their responsibilities to protect civilians. We think that efforts to artificially introduce such criteria are fraught with serious political manipulation and strengthen elements of intrusiveness in international relations. We believe that, when assessing efforts in that area, we need to take into account the economic, social, historical, religious, cultural and other specific aspects of countries and regions, as well as the nature of each conflict, its root causes and options for finding a settlement.

Russia believes that the adoption by the international community of any reactive measure to protect civilians that involves the use of force is possible only with the approval of the Security Council and in unswerving respect for the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. We regret cases of unsatisfactory implementation of Council resolutions relating to the protection of civilians.

In particular, there remain a number of question marks hanging over the participants in the NATO operation in Libya regarding how the relevant Security Council resolutions were implemented in practice. All cases of the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force during conflict that claims civilian victims need to be investigated, and the guilty brought to justice.

We call on all members of the international community to eschew indiscriminate, unilateral approaches to the issue of the protection of civilians. We believe that only strict compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights standards and unswerving implementation of relevant decisions of the

Security Council can help us to resolve protracted conflicts. Moreover, we believe that the Council has sufficient capacities at its disposal and that it would be unwise to create any new specialized Security Council mechanisms for the protection of civilians.