

Statement by Sudan on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Wednesday, 11 November 2009

My delegation associates itself with the statement presented by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and we would also like to associate ourselves with the statement that will be presented by the Permanent Representative of Zambia on behalf of the African Group.

I would like at the outset of my statement to congratulate the Permanent Representative of Austria on presiding over the Security Council for this month, while expressing my appreciation for his concern in dedicating today's deliberations to the theme of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. My thanks are also due for the concept paper that was circulated to enrich the deliberations on this item, bearing in mind the fact that ten years have passed since the Secretary-General delivered his first report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957) to your Council. We are still hopeful that the current deliberations of the Security Council on this subject will lead to the crystallization of a comprehensive approach and a distinct, objective vision of the optimal means of protecting civilians, foremost among which must be uprooting the causes of armed conflicts. Avoiding the causes of conflicts and supporting integrated comprehensive political settlements constitute the best safeguard of the protection of civilians. As we say, prevention is better than cure.

Needless to say, atrocities and threats against civilians are no longer merely a matter of violence and displacement but have now escalated, in the blatant aggression against Gaza, into more devastating and destructive acts in a manner that has alarmed humanity at large. Indeed that assault represents an unprecedented transformation in the targeting civilians using the most modern of lethal technologies that the death-and-destruction machine has come up with, including cluster and phosphorus bombs, in addition to all other internationally prohibited weapons, producing scenes that have upset the conscience of the world in a manner that has put the credibility of this Council at risk as regards the seriousness with which it deals with the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Today's deliberations may help us to find a way out of this complex maze of prejudice and double standards in tackling this matter.

The recommendations of the Secretary-General and all his relevant reports have focused on the importance of activating and increasing the capabilities of United Nations peacekeeping missions in the field of the protection of civilians. However, the reality of practical experiences in a number of countries has evidently shown that, when peace on the ground does not exist to be maintained, peacekeeping missions, no matter how they enhance their capacities in the field of protection, will never achieve the desired goals in this regard because what protects civilians fundamentally is peace. I repeat, what protects civilians is the peace that everyone is seeking, as well as the ensuing speedy implementation of development, rehabilitation, revival, rebuilding, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and the quick return of social services, so as to facilitate a speedy settlement of returnees and to ensure that civilians leave their camps and shelters to go back to their countries of origin and to the resumption of their everyday activities. The United Nations must therefore make peacemaking its priority and not be

distracted by secondary, incidental matters that accompany conflicts. We must stress the proven capabilities of regional organizations in peacemaking and peacekeeping owing to their direct relation and full familiarity with the nature and causes of the conflict at hand. Here we should like to recall the decisions of the meeting organized by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Dakar in April 2007 on the role of regional organizations in the protection of civilians and in peacemaking.

The principle of the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a sublime principle to which we all aspire. Yet we are concerned by the attempts by some States to use that principled goal to serve specific political objectives, such as the current propagation of the so-called responsibility to protect. And we should like to emphasize in this forum that the principle of the responsibility to protect, though contained in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, is, as you know, still subject to varied interpretation by various Member States. We must also bear in mind the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations with regard to each State's sovereignty, legitimacy and complete and full responsibility for the protection of the civilian population of that State. We must recall that the right to protect civilians in armed conflict is part and parcel of an integrated, interrelated system of rights and obligations that was confirmed by that same Outcome Document. The main pivot of that Summit was to follow up on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular development, poverty reduction and conflict prevention by tackling its root causes, as I mentioned. Hence the protection of civilians has to take place within a comprehensive integrated framework. I repeat: the protection of civilians has to be done within an integrated, comprehensive framework that focuses principally on tackling the root causes of conflict at an early stage, with effective support from the Security Council in guiding processes of reconciliation and political settlement. This should be complemented by the parallel roles of the Secretariat and the specialized agencies of the United Nations, with regard to humanitarian aspects and in support of sustainable economic development, and of donors, in honouring their development commitments.

The protection of civilians is, at the end of the day, the responsibility of the State. Thus, States concerned have to be equipped with better capabilities to shoulder their responsibilities appropriately and must not be weakened by means of sanctions and other measures that those who impose them sometimes call smart sanctions, sometimes targeted sanctions, or other twisted interpretations that have never changed the fact that the population is inevitably hurt by them.

In conclusion, we should like to reaffirm the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to addressing the matter of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, without selectivity or discrimination. We also hope that the Security Council will prove, in a practical manner, its commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict by dealing decisively with what was done to the civilians in Gaza. It is a fortuitous coincidence that our discussion of this topic follows the General Assembly's examination of the Goldstone report (A/64/490), which proved where peace-loving nations stand. There are those who claim to support peace and fight against impunity, but with great hypocrisy. That is the main lesson we have learned.