

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



STATEMENT by

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

at the

**UN SECURITY COUNCIL
OPEN DEBATE**

on

The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

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Mr. President,

I would like to express our appreciation to you for organizing and chairing this debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a common concern for us all and constitutes one of the top priorities for the international community. Unfortunately, a vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts continue to be civilians. We condemn all attacks on civilians and we are deeply concerned about their destructive effects, particularly on women and children.

Turkey therefore welcomes the increased attention of the Council to the issue of protection of civilians. We believe that the normative framework on the protection of civilians has been largely established. There now needs to be an increased focus on implementation, rather than norm-setting. It is now time to translate legal commitments into action.

There is no doubt that the primary obligation for protecting civilians lies with States. However, the international community also has a shared responsibility to help protect civilians in situations where States openly fail to do so. The Security Council has a particular and inevitable obligation in this regard, which have consequences on the ground.

Mr. President,

Syria is a case in point. The humanitarian situation in Syria is getting grimmer everyday as we are approaching the two-year mark for the crisis. The regime fails to fulfill its responsibility to protect the civilians, in a grave escalation of violence with the use of its heavy weaponry, aerial bombings and missiles. The primary responsibility to end this violence lies with the regime. Certainly the international community should play its part in extending a helping hand to the Syrian people in need. The current level of cooperation with the humanitarian assistance institutions are further aggravating the dire circumstances. This validates the relevance of the calls for unhindered access to all areas, by most convenient and effective routes, in order to implement the Humanitarian Response Plan. Bilateral and collective initiatives should not only focus on the humanitarian

consequences, but also the political causes of the crisis, which seriously threaten regional peace and stability.

Regrettably also, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be a major threat to the regional peace. Central to this crisis is the ongoing occupation of the land of the State of Palestine, and the policies to maintain this occupation. The illegal blockade on Gaza is in its sixth year in defiance of the international law, including the Security Council Resolution 1860. Recent operation “Pillar of Defense” resulted in the deaths of over a hundred Palestinians and severe damage to their livelihood. With discriminating regulations in force, as well as *faits accomplis* on the ground, in the form of settlement activities, fundamental rights of the Palestinian People are denied everyday not only in Gaza and the West Bank, but also elsewhere in the region where they are living as refugees. The obstacles created by the occupation are incompatible with the dignity and value of human beings. They must be eliminated without further delay.

Mr. President,

Unfortunately most of our attention and efforts come when it is time to extinguish the crises that have escalated into violence. The best protection that can be offered to civilians is to prevent armed conflicts in the first place, and to address their root causes. We need to place greater emphasis on preventing conflicts from erupting; this will save many lives and resources.

In this context, promotion of human rights, rule of law, democracy and good governance should continuously be on our agenda, on global and regional levels. These concepts are not only essential for a functioning and healthy society, but they are also important for the prevention of conflict, as they are the building blocks of a society that is least likely to fall into conflict. Furthermore, in cases when conflicts can not be prevented, the presence of these qualities assists the protection of civilians, by decreasing the intensity of the conflict, the level of violence and chances of relapse.

We should also make sure that the perpetrators of crimes against civilians are held fully accountable for their actions. This pertains not only to the punitive, but even more so to the

preventive face of justice. The international community has a duty to do more in this direction, including through capacity building and technical assistance.

Mr. President,

The importance of peacekeeping operations, in relation to the protection of civilians, has also increased throughout the years. This is clearly reflected in the growing number of protection of civilians mandates. While formulating and planning the implementation of such mandates, there is a need to listen more to the regional countries and organizations, troop contributing countries, and other relevant countries that are active in such crisis areas. They have a better understanding on the difficulties on the ground, as well as the cultural differences and sensitivities of each country. Furthermore, when tasked with protection of civilians mandates, we must ensure that proper resources and training are provided to the peacekeepers.

Before I conclude my remarks, allow me to reiterate the clear distinction between counter-terrorism efforts of law enforcement agencies and armed conflict, with regards to the application of the concept of protection of civilians. Turkey strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and acknowledges the legitimate right of governments to combat terrorism. Furthermore, utmost diligence should be observed, in order not to extend any sense of legitimacy to terrorist organizations. On this note, we would like to, once again, underline our position that UN documents should not contain positive references to NGOs that are known to have become instruments to terrorist organizations.

Thank you.