

**Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, may I congratulate you on your fine work as President of the Security Council this month. I welcome the initiative that enables us to discuss this very important issue, namely the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

Armed conflicts are characterized by their changing nature, which involves a multiplicity of factors, requiring, in turn, an integral approach. The parties involved, the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Council, as well as other organs of the system within their respective fields of competence, must develop prevention strategies to safeguard peace and protect civilians, dealing with the underlying causes of armed conflicts: poverty, external intervention by international corporations, desire for domination on the part of some countries, and so forth.

Our State has had the responsibility of protecting civilians displaced by the internal conflict being experienced by our Colombian neighbours and have received them as brothers and sisters and as though they were citizens of our country. These are civilians who flee from their lands and their homes to escape the internal war. Many of them settle in our country, and we welcome them and integrate them into our society. Other displaced persons return to their homes in Colombia when they see the opportunity for a fresh start. In these circumstances, they have been treated in strict compliance with humanitarian law and in keeping with our constitutional responsibility to respect human rights.

Nonetheless, that has not been the fate of other peoples in the world, and here I must refer to the specific case of the long-suffering people of Palestine. The illegal occupation of Gaza by the Government of Israel towards the end of 2008 and in early 2009 gave rise to the criminal imposition of a curfew on the civilian population, which still persists. On that occasion, over 1,300 Palestinian children and women were killed and 5,300 were wounded or mutilated for life by these undesirable practices. This situation must not go unpunished. Otherwise, some countries waging war would be encouraged to engage in the perverse practice of targeting civilians and the people for military attacks. Practices such as these must be the subject of the most rigorous consideration by this body, fully backed by the General Assembly, and the necessary legal measures to avoid more civilian lives being lost because of the impunity syndrome must be taken.

Wrongful practices against civilians also include the detention of children, adolescents and women in military conflicts for the alleged purpose of obtaining information about the conflict and its protagonists, a situation that is in clear violation of the human rights of civilians. Another practice consists in attacking humanitarian missions, such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent and United Nations peacekeeping operations, as we have seen in Gaza in recent months, with the destruction of infrastructure for public services, housing, schools and United Nations buildings where staff of this Organization who were on a humanitarian mission lost their lives.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reiterates that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts resides with States, and that the international community can play a constructive role in support of national efforts, always with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

We also view with concern the attempts of some States to interpret as they see fit the concept of responsibility to protect contained in paragraph 139 of the Final Document of 2005 World Summit. Some countries have groundlessly tried to affirm that this concept is a norm that can be implemented without the required discussions, but we believe that the General Assembly must discuss this concept and provide it with a consensus interpretation.

Finally, Venezuela would like to reiterate its commitment to peace and its readiness to debate in the General Assembly all measures to effectively protect civilians in armed conflict. We are convinced that it is in that body that we can achieve the genuine political commitment of States in the implementation of the norms of international humanitarian law and human rights on behalf of civilian populations affected by such conflicts.