

Statement by H. E. Ambassador Li Baodong, Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, at the Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

2011/05/10

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Mr. President,

I wish to thank the French delegation for having convened this open debate. I also wish to thank Under-Secretaries-General Amos and Le Roy and Assistant Secretary-General Šimonović for their statements.

China is deeply concerned about the safety of civilian lives and property during armed conflict, which have been negatively impacted and threatened. We condemn acts of violence deliberately targeting civilians in situations of armed conflict. Today, I wish to underscore four points.

First, the strengthening of the protection of civilians in armed conflict must strictly abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The responsibility to protect civilians lies first and foremost with the Government of the country concerned. The international community and external organizations can provide constructive assistance, but they must observe the principles of objectivity and neutrality and fully respect the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country concerned. There must be no attempt at regime change or involvement in civil war by any party under the guise of protecting civilians.

Secondly, in order to fundamentally address the objective of the protection of civilians, more must be done in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution. The Security Council should as a priority engage in preventive diplomacy and prevent or reduce conflict in regions where there is turmoil. The Council should as a priority urge the parties concerned to cease hostilities and achieve a ceasefire. Only by actively promoting a political solution by peaceful means through dialogue and negotiation can civilian casualties be minimized. Military means are not an effective answer to these issues.

Thirdly, strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict must be done through implementation of Security Council decisions in a comprehensive and strict manner. The original intention of resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011) was to put an end to violence and to protect civilians. We are opposed to any attempt to wilfully interpret the resolutions or to take actions that exceed those mandated by the resolutions. In implementing the resolutions, efforts must be made to avoid yet greater civilian casualties.

Fourthly, the protection of civilians in armed conflict involves the development and evolution of the norms of international humanitarian law, which should be discussed in depth by the wider membership of the United Nations in order to reach consensus. Conflict situations vary, and there must be no one-size-fits-all approach to the protection of civilians. Various parties still hold divergent views on the responsibility to protect, and the General Assembly should continue its

discussion on this matter.

The deployment of United Nations peacekeeping operations alone cannot fundamentally address the issue of the protection of civilians. In authorizing the United Nations to protect civilians, the specific situation of the country concerned, as well as the capabilities of the United Nations, must be taken into full consideration. United Nations peacekeeping operations must continue to abide by the principles of objectivity and neutrality and avoid taking sides in local political disputes or even becoming a party to the conflict.

Thank you, Mr. President.