PERMANENT MISSION OF DENMARK TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Løj Permanent Representative of Denmark



United Nations Security Council Open debate on protection of civilians in armed conflict

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Mr. President,

Let me begin by thanking the delegation of the United Kingdom for convening this meeting and once again focusing the attention of the Security Council on the hardship of civilians in armed conflicts.

I would also like to express our gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Jan Egeland, and Vice-President of the ICRC, Mr. Jacques Forster, for their clear and thought-provoking presentation of the issue.

Finally, I would like to fully associate myself with the statement to be delivered later in the debate by you Mr. President as the Permanent Representative of United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. President,

In the day-to-day work of the United Nations we sometimes seem to forget the overarching purpose of our efforts. We are here to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war; to reaffirm faith in the dignity and worth of the human person and to establish conditions under which justice can be maintained. This is our purpose – our raison d'être.

And this is why Denmark believes that the "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict" is one of the most important thematic issues on the agenda of the Security Council. We – the peoples of the United Nations – must act to ensure the protection of our fellow human beings in particular during armed conflicts. This is a responsibility that we have not always been able to live up to. We need to enforce the so-called "culture of prevention" that the Secretary General has called for.

On this note I would like to sincerely thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for providing the Council with such a strong and comprehensive draft resolution on the protection of civilians. It includes a number of indispensable measures and forward looking elements for the future work in the Security Council – and in the UN as a whole – and we look forward to its early adoption.

Mr. President,

As clearly demonstrated in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2005/740) the issue of "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict" is one of great complexity. Only by taking a multifaceted comprehensive approach including legal, political as well as socio-economic measures can we fully address the great number of problems related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As recognized by our heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit peace and security, development and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing and they are the foundations for collective security and well-being.

The report identifies a number of general trends that affect the lives of civilians in conflict. Indeed, the list of trends is sobering reading. The armed conflicts of today unleash their full wrath not on the opposing army, but on the civilian population in clear violation of all rules and principles of international law.

However, the report also provides a number of valuable recommendations for measures and actions that the Security Council can take to strengthen and improve its response to the protection needs of civilians in armed conflict. Denmark fully supports these recommendations. Allow me in this regard to address two key points of particular importance for the future work of the Security Council and the UN-system as a whole: "responsibility to protect" and "the fight against impunity".

Mr. President,

The 2005 World Summit Outcome underlined that each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This is not an obligation to be taken lightly.

Urifortunately, recent history demonstrates that national authorities sometimes are either unwilling or unable to provide the required protection. Should the international community confronted with such manifest failings just sit back and allow a new "Srebrenica" or "Rwanda" to unfold in front of our eyes? The answer to this question is obvious and was fully addressed by our heads of states and governments at the 2005 World Summit.

One of the keystones in the fulfillment of the purposes of the United Nations is for the international community to take appropriate action to protect civilian populations. The UN Charter provides a clear framework for our response. We have a responsibility to use all peaceful means to provide sufficient protection. But if these means fail, it is our responsibility to use all necessary and available means – including collective action in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter - to put an end to ongoing acts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It is not just something we can consider doing – it is something we must do.

Denmark is looking forward to further discussions in the Security Council of this question as part of the contribution by the Council to the important task of strengthening international law.

Mr. President,

There can be no real peace without real justice. An armed conflict is not fully concluded before those responsible for atrocities committed against the civilian population are brought to justice.

In order to provide protection of civilians during and after an armed conflict we must fight impunity at the national, regional and international level. For these reasons Denmark has always strongly supported the work of the Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

The impact of the Tribunals, however, goes far beyond the specific cases under their jurisdiction. Their pioneering work has paved the way for the International Criminal Court - a permanent, universal institution standing ready and alert to fight impunity for the most serious crimes.

The Security Council must continue to explore ways and means to fight impunity. A number of international mechanisms, including the ICC, are in place. Universal legal protection standards already exist. And while all states are free to choose which international instruments they wish to become parties to, it is key that we use all means at our disposal to ensure that justice prevails. The Security Council should continue to discuss also these issues as part of our discussions on the strengthening of international law.

Mr. President,

As we move forward in our efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict, the "lo-Point Platform of Action" - earlier presented to the Security Council by USG Mr. Jan Egeland - should guide the work of the UN as a whole. We need to take effective measures to implement these points of action.

We must ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in need. We must improve the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. The protection of internally displaced persons and refugees is crucial - we already have a plan – the Agenda for Protection – which requires our attention and implementation. Finally, we must in all our efforts pay particular attention to the special protection requirements of women and children and take all necessary measures to put and end to the systematic and widespread sexual violence committed against women and girls in armed conflicts.

Specific action is needed including capacity building. This is why Denmark is supporting OCHA's proposal for "Increase Capacity for Protection". This pilot project will ensure a standby capacity of protection officers that can be quickly deployed in situations where urgent protection needs of civilians occur.

Real change starts of home. Thus, real improvements on all of these issues should start in our daily work in the Security Council. Denmark stands ready to adopt a strong and forward-looking resolution and to work for its full implementation for the benefit of the millions of civilians trapped in armed conflict.

I thank you Mr. President.