

Statement of Under-Secretary-General, Jan Egeland
at the open meeting of the Security Council
on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
28 June 2006

Madam President, Members of the Council, there are signs of progress in our work to better protect civilians caught in conflict.

Firstly, while there are over 20 million displaced persons of concern to UNHCR worldwide, the High Commissioner documents that the overall number of refugees fell to 8.4 million in 2005, the lowest figure since the 1960s, half the number of a decade ago. Secondly, in a number of countries, including Southern Sudan and Burundi, the prospects for return for the displaced are improving – a positive development. Thirdly, with a reduction in the number of armed conflicts, according to the Human Security Report, most of us are living in a safer world. Conflicts have been resolved and displacement brought to an end in, for example, Angola, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

Our collective efforts are having an impact: more systematic engagement by the Security Council in more crisis areas; more comprehensive peacekeeping; enhanced humanitarian response; and more mediation and effective judicial recourse offered in more places have contributed to stronger protection and the reduction of conflict related civilian deaths. Where there is concerted, coherent and systematic international action, and strong positive political engagement from the parties to conflicts, we can, and we will make significant progress.

The recent adoption of Security Council resolution, 1674, on the protection of civilians in armed conflict is fundamental to this progress. This represents a strengthening of the existing resolutions; 1265 and 1296. Together they provide a principled framework to ensure better protection for all civilians in situations of conflict. This new resolution

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details how peacekeeping missions can better provide physical protection for civilians. However, it still fails to ensure a predictable response to the massive suffering of vulnerable civilians. We as the UN, and you as the Security Council, now have the responsibility to protect as reaffirmed in Resolution 1674. There are too many times when we still do not come to the defence of civilian populations in need. When our response is weak, we appear to wash our hands of our humanitarian responsibilities to protect lives. The world is a safer place for most of us, but it is still a death trap for too many defenceless civilians, men, women and children.

In Iraq, Sudan, Uganda, Somalia, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, civilians continue to bear the full brunt of armed conflict and terror. Despite all our efforts, women are still raped and violated as a matter of course, children are still forcibly recruited, and defenceless civilians continue to be killed – in violation of the most basic principles enshrined in centuries of international lawmaking. Madam President, in the time that we will take today to debate how best to protect civilians, dozens will have died from the direct, blunt and brutal violence of conflict in only the six crisis situations I have just mentioned.

At the end of June, President Karzai stated that up to 600 civilians have been killed in Afghanistan in recent weeks. Indicators suggest that with central authorities being unable to provide security in 80% of Afghan territory, the security situation may worsen further. In Somalia, the prognosis is equally bleak. In the last four months 500 people have been killed and 2,000 injured and an estimated 18,000 displaced, as a result of the fighting in Mogadishu alone. Urgent political action is required to stop this country, already ravaged by war, spiralling back into even further chaos. In the DRC, figures are worse still, with daily reports of massacres, rapes and scores of children dying from disease and neglect associated with the conflict.

In Darfur, the African Union reports that 69 people were killed in the month immediately after the signing of the Darfur Peace Accord. We know that the real figures are much higher and that general mortality is once again on the rise among the hundreds and

thousands of people in Darfur to whom there is limited or no humanitarian access

However, it is in Iraq that the greatest numbers of civilians are being killed by indiscriminate acts of terror, and sectarian and conflict violence. The figures vary and are controversial, but those quoted by Iraqi Government sources are staggering. Official Iraqi Health Ministry figures from the main mortuary in Baghdad reveal that it has received over 6,000 bodies of Iraqis killed since the beginning of the year. These figures represent a worsening trend since President Bush delivered his address to the World Affairs Council in December 2005 and estimated that over 30,000 civilians were killed between March 2003 and the end of 2005. Whatever caveats are applied to these figures, the undeniable truth is shocking: scores of defenceless civilians are continuing to be intentionally and brutally killed on a daily basis mostly in indiscriminate sectarian violence and terror, but also as victims of combat operations. With the targeting of mosques, school buses and markets, no one is immune. Neither the national authorities nor the massive international involvement have been so far able to effectively protect the civilian population.

Currently, there is no humanitarian crisis in Iraq as was predicted by many. For the most part, provincial health structures, water and sanitation, food supply, and social services are functioning. However, in the last six months alone, 110,000 people have been displaced by violence with the numbers continuing to rise. Failure to address this displacement will result in growing humanitarian needs.

In certain countries in Africa, the humanitarian situation is far more precarious. Conflict has decimated whatever fragile infrastructure was in place, and people have become infinitely more vulnerable. As a result civilians die in exponentially larger numbers from associated disease and malnutrition than from the violence itself. Mortality studies undertaken by the UN and the International Rescue Committee in the DRC and Northern Uganda exemplify this toll. It is estimated that up to 1,200 people are dying in silence every day in the DRC and a mortality rate of 1.54 per 10,000 people per day in Northern Uganda, not only exceeds emergency thresholds, but is greater even than that for Darfur in 2005.

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In Darfur and eastern Chad, attacks against civilians continue to be undertaken by the Janjaweed, other militia groups, elements of the SLA and by government forces. In late May, militia attacks around Mukjar in West Darfur killed over 25 civilians, displacing scores more. In North Darfur, intra-rebel fighting prior to and after the signing of the Darfur Peace Accord has displaced thousands, and included horrific acts of violence. Janjaweed incursions moving further into Chad have brought fear and significantly threatened the civilian nature of refugee camps. Between 12-14 April, 118 people were shot or brutally hacked to death in a massacre in Djawara and three other villages 70 kilometers east of the Sudanese border. Recent analysis from human rights colleagues of the UN Mission indicates that this may be the beginning of a new phase of violence in which armed groups, militias, rebel groups and the army are intensifying their targeting of civilian populations.

In DRC, serious attempts are being made to stem the violence and address impunity with the surrender and imprisonment of prominent *Mayi-Mayi* and armed group leaders and the ICC indictment of all ex-UPC commander for human rights violations. But, in a context where hundreds of thousands of civilians, continue to suffer from ongoing violence in areas such as Katanga, Ituri and the Kivus, the impact of these actions is limited. Nearly all serious violations committed against the civilian population by all parties still go unchecked.

Madam President, a key question is how we can we make the recently adopted Security Council Resolution 1674 on the protection of civilians offer a real platform for action. Protection has been placed as a central responsibility of peacekeeping mandates. This commitment acknowledges that it is by how well the United Nations protects that our missions will be judged.

You have created a range of protection tools at your disposal. These must be used more effectively. The Council's Presidential Statement of June 2005 rightly expressed grave concern over the limited progress to ensure the effective protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict. It stressed the urgent need to provide better physical protection and

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underscored that the establishment of a secure environment for all vulnerable populations should be a key objective of peacekeeping operations.

States have the primary responsibility for the protection of their own people. But in the case of armed conflict within their own territories, they all too often lack the capacity and will to do so. The humanitarian community helps create an environment where the will and the capacity can be re-established or re-created. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue has shown that humanitarian presence can have some beneficial effect, deterring violence. However, let's be honest. Humanitarian presence has limitations. In many situations, like in today's eastern Chad security is so precarious that civilians and, often, humanitarian staff need physical protection, which today is virtually non-existent. This is where your role as the Security Council in defining and facilitating the role and capacity of peacekeepers is so crucial.

Firstly, peace-keeping missions must be equipped with better, more comprehensive mandates and the means to fulfil them. In two round-table consultations OCHA has organised with Council Members, other Member States, DPKO and agency colleagues, we examined the implementation of protection mandates of the peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in CGte d'Ivoire. From these consultations it is clear that our people on the ground are too often ill-equipped to fulfil their duty to protect. Realistic, well designed mandates for missions and practical support for their implementation are fundamental to the effectiveness of their efforts. In 2002, you adopted the *Aide Memoire* to assist in the process of formulating peacekeeping mandates to properly address protection needs. It is now time for this vital tool to be reviewed and updated and put to better use. My office stands ready to support this process.

Secondly, new creative approaches to peacekeeping are required and the composition of Missions amended. Instead of being adapted to allow a flexible response to emerging threats, new tasks are often simply added on to old ones. In Côte d'Ivoire, new threats for civilians have emerged, with groups like the *Jeunes Patriotes* using street violence and criminality to advance their agenda. Soldiers are not trained to meet these challenges.

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Recent reinforcements authorised by the Council for UNOCI that include additional Formed Police Units are most important. The roundtable consultations also highlighted the difficulties of interpreting imminent threats of violence on the ground. Peacekeepers must be given tools, guidance and support if they are to respond to these threats and provide better protection.

Humanitarian access is the first stepping stone to the protection of civilians. The Security Council must make every effort to ensure that access is granted and respected. By not responding more forcefully in cases where this access has been unreasonably denied, we risk placing humanitarian personnel in jeopardy, further exposing them to possible attack. Humanitarian workers remain at considerable risk to violence. In Afghanistan alone, 24 humanitarian workers have been killed since the beginning of the year including four humanitarian colleagues working with Action Aid who were summarily shot in the head by the roadside in Jawzjan less than a month ago. On the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip restrictions on access for humanitarian goods and supplies, coupled with limitations on the movement of UN and humanitarian personnel, continue to pose severe problems for humanitarian agencies operating in the oPt.

One of the most important tools at our disposal is conflict mediation and the timely and effective use of good offices. A number of violent crises highlight the grave cost in human lives of inadequate timely mediation. It also underscores that conflict can only ever be resolved at the political level. Intentional protection, whether by peacekeepers or humanitarians, can only ever be an interim response, a band aid. Without political solutions, tragically, civilians continue to suffer and the humanitarians are left to deal with intractable conflict and open ended displacement.

We must activate, strengthen and resource the Secretary General's good offices more often and earlier, seize every opportunity for mediation and speak out when political solutions are needed. The appropriate space and channels for this to work need to be created and better individual training provided. I welcome the opportunity to take these discussions forward with the Department of Political Affairs to strengthen mediation capacity in the field.

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Targeted sanctions and embargoes are also yet to be used optimally, despite our efforts to develop guidance for their effective use. Targeted sanctions should be employed at the earliest opportunity, where violations against civilians prevail, to signal our concern and serve as a first step to protect. I would have hoped that the Sanctions Committee had been more consistent in the case of Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere, where we have seen deliberate attacks on civilians as well as UN personnel and assets. In Cote d'Ivoire, individual sanctions levied against three members of the Jeunes Patriotes and the *Force Nouvelles*, did have an immediate ameliorative effect. But why did we stop there? Why, for example, has no action been taken by the Security Council, or by the National Authorities against those publicly and loudly responsible for Radio Guiglo, which inspired and directed mob violence against civilians and humanitarian organisations in January? And why are we not using sanctions strategically in other crises? And where embargoes are in place, but are violated why is stronger action not being taken? For example, the Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia has documented daily arms shipments to militias and warlords which fuelled the fighting which then engulfed the only two hospitals in Mogadishu.

Protection is a collective responsibility. To strengthen protection response, we in the Secretariat have our own responsibilities to fulfil. We need to work with you to ensure better provision of information, strengthened analysis and comprehensive planning of our protection response. The mechanism that has been established through Council Resolution 1612 to monitor and report on the impact of children in armed conflict is already showing some results. Work is in progress to ensure that a reporting mechanism on broader protection concerns is dovetailed with this initiative. Agency colleagues are working together to build on the methodologies and practice already developed and pilot protection monitoring mechanisms have been established in Darfur, Somalia and the DRC. Better methods of analysis are also needed to ensure that local populations are included as a crucial element in our decision making processes. The perceptions of the local population are critical to understanding where risks lie.

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Joint planning is also essential. In the mission planning for Darfur, DPKO, OCHA and other key UN actors have worked in close collaboration to ensure better provision for the protection of civilians. This should set the standard. In general, integration is most effective where it is formulated around a common objective, such as protection. MONUC serves as a positive example of this. In Cote d'Ivoire, similar initiatives are now being taken where an expanded inter agency committee has been created that brings humanitarians together with key actors from the peacekeeping mission to work collaboratively to provide protection. In Uganda, where there is no peacekeeping presence OCHA and DPKO are starting to work with the Ugandan Security Forces to facilitate civil military relations and strengthen the capacity of national security forces to provide protection.

Madam President, these actions will have limited impact if we fail to address the need to uphold and respect the universal values as enshrined in the tenets and rules of international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. The new Human Rights Council, is a welcomed addition to the international architecture to safeguard the rule of law. But, if we are unable to fulfil our responsibilities or enforce the legal frameworks that we have created, and impunity prevails unchallenged, we will consistently fail to protect civilians caught in conflict.

Such protection must be provided consistently and without prejudice. We grapple, in particular, with how to meet the specific protection and assistance needs of indigenous groups and ethnic minorities who are amongst those at greatest risk. The situation faced by ethnic minorities in Colombia is one case of many that illustrates this challenge. Indigenous people and Afro-Colombians are increasingly under pressure from illegal armed groups. Minority leaders are victims of forced abduction, torture and assassination. Several hundred persons from indigenous communities have been assassinated mostly by FARC guerillas and paramilitary groups. Children are forcibly recruited by the armed groups, and women and young girls raped, Many are forced from their ancestral lands, reduced to begging in urban slums, slowly eroding their traditions and culture. A dozen indigenous communities are on the verge of extinction. We cannot stand by as passive witnesses to the

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loss of life and the loss of cultures.

Madam President, in conclusion, I sincerely believe that progress to ensure better protection for civilians has been made – just not enough. The numbers of innocent civilians who continue to be killed and live with the constant threat of violence is unacceptable. We must work together, at all levels and using every tool at our disposal to provide adequate protection for those living in the midst of conflict around the world.

There is much at stake. In these dangerous and polarised times it could not be more important to reaffirm the rule of law, which lies at the heart of the protection agenda. Where we fail, countries emerging from crisis are at serious risk of spiralling back into conflict, as the current situations in Timor Leste and Sri Lanka make clear. Together with my humanitarian colleagues, I stand ready to continue to work with you and Member States towards the creation of a real culture of protection, and a safer world for all.

Thank you,

