

# EXCERPTED STATEMENTS ON THE OPEN DEBATE ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT

4 December 2006  
Security Council Chamber

**United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland:**

(...)Last year, as Members of the United Nations, Council members solemnly pledged to accept the **responsibility to protect** civilian populations. We are, sadly, still far away from seeing that responsibility translate into predictable and adequate action to provide protection for all beleaguered and threatened communities irrespective of time, place and circumstance. That **responsibility to protect** must be depoliticized, become a truly shared interest and translate into joint action by all members of the Council and by our global Organization. Thereby, members will live up to the expectations of tens of millions of vulnerable men, women and children for a United Nations that is united.

I have seen during my tenure as Emergency Relief Coordinator that we have succeeded in providing security when in the end there was united action taken by all members. We are seeing vast progress in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in South Sudan thanks to that. We have not had the same unity of purpose or action in Darfur or in Gaza. Our readiness to act, to sanction and to fund must be the same in Uganda, in Chad or Côte d'Ivoire as it is in Afghanistan, Kosovo or Iraq. Our **responsibility to protect** must transcend singular interests and become a core principle of humanity across all civilizations. That is why this regular thematic debate on the protection of civilians matters so much. When the lives and safety of civilians are at stake, regardless of where, neither strategic nor economic or other political interests should deter members from acting swiftly upon their united **responsibility to protect**. (...)

**China**  
**Mr. Liu Zhenmin (spoke in Chinese):**

(...)First, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, the **responsibility to protect** civilians lies primarily with the Governments of the countries concerned. While the international community and other external parties can provide support and assistance and urge the parties concerned seriously to implement the provisions of humanitarian law and to avoid harming civilians, they should not infringe upon the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries concerned, nor should they enforce intervention by circumventing the Governments of such countries. (...)

In discussing the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Security Council should continue to approach with caution the concept of the **responsibility to protect**. The World Summit Outcome last year gave an extensive and very cautious representation of the **responsibility to protect** populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and went on to request the General Assembly to continue to explore this concept. As many Member States have expressed their concern and misgivings in that regard, we believe that it is not appropriate to expand, willfully interpret or even abuse this concept. Resolution 1674 (2006) only reaffirmed in principle the relevant statement as contained in the Summit Outcome, without any further elaboration. All sides should continue to abide by the relevant agreed elements of the Summit Outcome in interpreting or applying this concept. In that context, the Security Council cannot and should not take over the role of the General Assembly or make any prejudgment. (...)

**United States of America**  
**Ms. Wolcott Sanders**

(...)The primary **responsibility for protecting** civilians lies with the parties to a conflict. In such situations of violent conflict, we must do everything appropriate to protect innocent civilians from the impact of armed conflict. In situations where a State is unable or unwilling to protect its civilians, the international community has a distinct role. We must also continue to focus our efforts on the prevention of conflict itself.

(...)The situation in Darfur illustrates clearly a situation in which the international community has a role to play in safeguarding civilians in armed conflict, including those who are internally displaced, since traditional means of protection have broken down. (...)

**Ghana**  
**Nana Effah-Apenteng:**

(...) Although General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 1991 entrusted Governments and States with the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, parties embroiled in armed conflict are invariably unable to discharge their obligations owing to various inhibiting factors. It is for that reason that the international community, and especially the United Nations, has over the years been at the forefront of this critical humanitarian duty. Indeed, the pivotal role of the United Nations was recognized by world leaders in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit Outcome document, and subsequently reaffirmed by resolution 1674 (2006).

In that connection, the rapid deployment of United Nations peacekeepers in conflict areas is imperative. We recognize that any deployment should be in conformity with the Charter. That notwithstanding, the Security Council has a **moral duty to act** in dire situations to save civilians not only from genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and other

grave violations of human rights abuses in line with the commitment made by our leaders last year.

It is also our view that the same sentiments underpin article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. We should stop paying lip service to the concept of the **responsibility to protect**, and have the political will to stand by the courage of our convictions. (...)

**Slovakia**  
**Mr. Burian**

(...)Despite the international community's growing commitment to better address the tragic plight of civilians trapped in situations of armed conflict - including through the adoption of resolution 1674 (2006), which reaffirmed the **responsibility to protect** populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity - we have witnessed the ongoing killing of civilians, sexual violence and attacks motivated by ethnic or religious hatred or political confrontation. (...)

**France**  
**Mr. De La Sablière (spoke in French):**

(...) I must stress that the **responsibility to protect** civilian populations falls first and foremost to the Governments concerned. Wherever populations are threatened, Governments must fully assume their **responsibilities to protect** them. The international community must ensure above all that they do not shirk those responsibilities. Regional organizations and the United Nations must encourage them and, if necessary, assume their own responsibilities. In a number of situations, such as in Darfur, the United Nations and regional organizations must work closely with one another. (...)

**Greece**  
**Mr. Vassilakis**

(...)Only some months ago the Security Council adopted its latest resolution, 1674 (2006), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict,

demonstrating its determination to enhance and improve its response to the protection needs of civilians in armed conflict.

The resolution also reaffirms the **pledge** of the world leaders during the World Summit in September last year **to protect** their own citizens and the citizens of other States if the latter manifestly fail to do so. Today, given the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in many conflict situations, the resolution remains as timely as ever. We believe that this meeting offers a good opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to its full implementation. (...)

### **Japan**

**Mr. Oshima:**

(...) In this connection, Security Council resolution 1674 (2006) reaffirms the **responsibility to protect** populations. In the 2005 Summit Outcome document our leaders expressed preparedness to take collective action through the Council in this matter. Bearing that in mind, the Council needs to further discuss the role it should play in protecting civilians in armed conflict more energetically and in more depth. I have already mentioned as a practical measure the need to update the Aide Memoire and the possibility of developing some kind of model matrix.

Those would be useful first steps, but they are not enough. The Council will need to go further and discuss how it can best ensure conditions necessary for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in general and in specific situations. In Darfur, for example, a serious gap remains between what the Government is able or willing to provide in terms of humanitarian access and safety of humanitarian personnel, and the real needs on the ground. Because of this crying gap, a countless number of people suffer or perish daily and the crisis intensifies despite the best intentions and efforts of the African Union through the deployment of its Mission in Sudan (AMIS). Additional urgent support to AMIS is essential as the least minimum,

pending agreement on transition to United Nations peacekeeping operations. (...)

But in the end, as Under-Secretary-General Egeland noted, international protection, whether by peacekeepers or humanitarians, can be only an interim response - a band-aid, to use his term. Efforts to improve the humanitarian situation cannot be separated from efforts on the political front, namely, securing a durable cessation of hostilities, developing fully the political process and engaging in effective peacekeeping activity. And here, the Council's ability and credibility is truly being tested. (...)

### **Denmark**

**Ms. Løj**

(...) Each individual State has the **responsibility to protect** its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Unfortunately, in some cases, States manifestly fail to provide the necessary protection - or the perpetrator is the State itself. In situations in which a State embarks on waging war against its own population, the **responsibility to protect** the civilians affected becomes that of the international community. We have a moral and political obligation not to turn our backs on the many civilians who suffer from attacks carried out by, or with the consent of, their own Governments.

Whether or not the concept of the **responsibility to protect** needs further consideration is, as such, irrelevant. Given the lack of action and engagement elsewhere, the basic political commitment not to allow another Rwanda or Srebrenica is the responsibility of all of us, including the Security Council, as well as of other United Nations bodies.

### **Peru**

**Mr. Voto-Bernales (spoke in Spanish):**

(...) According to the information that Mr. Egeland provided, much work remains to be done if the United Nations is to be effective in protecting

civilians in armed conflict. In view of the situations that he described, we must reaffirm the **responsibility** of the United Nations **to protect** human rights throughout the world and the duty to prevent war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing. We must also reaffirm the importance of the task of ensuring humanitarian access to civilian populations affected by conflict and protecting the staff who provide such assistance, as well as all civilians involved. In that connection, Peru believes that the Security Council should continue to sponsor effective and feasible actions to ensure the protection of civilians who find themselves immersed in armed conflict. (...)

**United Republic of Tanzania:**  
**Mr. Mahiga**

(...)Enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a fundamental responsibility of States and of the international community; we cannot afford to fail in that respect. (...)

Such insecurity is due to the presence or activities of armed groups and militias within and around camps and settlements. Governments need to be reminded of their **obligation to provide protection**. (...)

The greatest challenge to the Council and to the international community as a whole occurs when Governments not only **fail to protect** their citizens but are themselves the cause of insecurity to their citizens. How can we exercise our collective **responsibility to protect** under such circumstances? We should hold such Governments responsible and accountable for their actions. (...)

**Russian Federation**  
**Mr. Shcherbak (spoke in Russian):**

(...) [W]e call for the greatest prudence when dealing with documents and concepts worked out without coordination with all United Nations Member States or without any general discussion in the United Nations. We urge that they not be

promoted as being widely recognized under international standards.

In that context, it is to be expected that the concept of the **responsibility to protect** has not yet become a reality today specifically because in its present form it does not enjoy sufficiently broad support from Member States. In our view, it would be wiser to talk about the implementation of the more acceptable option enshrined in the 2005 Summit Outcome, namely, the **responsibility to protect** civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We would once again like to emphasize that, under this concept, the primary responsibility lies with national Governments, whose efforts must be supported by the international community without undermining State sovereignty. We expect the Peacebuilding Commission to take specific steps to assist in the stabilization of postconflict situations. (...)

**Finland**  
**Ms. Lintonen:**

(...)The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a complex challenge. Civilians, including women and children, continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts. The European Union welcomes the sustained attention paid by the Security Council to that important issue. At the 2005 World Summit, the heads of State and Government recognized that the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a key concern of the international community. The European Union reiterates its support for the historic Summit Outcome conclusion that each individual State has the **responsibility to protect** its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity - a conclusion which was reaffirmed by resolution 1674 (2006).

The best way to protect civilians in armed conflicts is to prevent conflicts. The EU is pleased to note the strengthening of the culture of prevention across the United Nations and vigorously supports the

continuation of this trend. The Security Council plays an important role in this regard. Timely and adequate briefings by the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and other relevant actors will help the Council to act sufficiently early on in conflict situations to effectively protect civilians at risk. (...)

**Canada**  
**Mr. McNee**

(...)Today, I would like to focus on three themes. First, the Security Council must demonstrate courageous leadership and unwavering political will to ensure that populations at risk have access to the greatest protection possible. Secondly, continued emphasis must be placed on ending impunity.

Perpetrators of attacks against civilians in violation of international law must be held accountable for their actions. Thirdly, we all share in the **responsibility to advance a culture of protection**. The Council, the United Nations Secretariat and agencies and Member States must make advocacy, monitoring and capacity building watchwords for our efforts. (...)

(spoke in French) While the leadership of the Security Council is essential to strengthen the **protection of civilians**, it is a **responsibility** that must be shared by all of us: the Council, the Secretariat, United Nations agencies and Member States. (...)

Canada encourages the Secretariat and United Nations agencies to leave no room for ambiguity in their assessments, because previous resolutions have authorized them to indicate to Member States situations that require their attention to protect civilians. It is essential to provide the Council and other competent bodies with concrete advice and recommendations. (...)

**Lebanon**  
**Ms. Ziade**

(...)Between 12 July and 14 August 2006, Lebanon was the target of a ferocious Israeli aggression, considered disproportionate by international legal standards as well as by the international community. The scope and the scale of the destruction were massive: 1,191 civilians were killed and more than 4,000 were injured. Approximately 900,000 people - one quarter of the Lebanese population - were displaced; many of them are still homeless. (...)

Impunity cannot be tolerated. The twisting of reality and blatant violations of international humanitarian law cannot be accepted. The failure of the Security Council to take responsible action to ensure access to Lebanese civilians and to protect humanitarian convoys over a three-week period should not be repeated. The Security Council has the **responsibility** to act swiftly **to protect** civilians. (...)