



SLOVAKIA

STATEMENT BY

H.E. Mr. Peter Burian

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in the open debate of the United Nations Security Council
on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate. We fully align ourselves with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union stressing the need to address wider scope of issues connected with the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and identifying many existing gaps in international humanitarian law in this area.

Mr. President,

Even years after Srebrenica and Rwanda we still witness attacks motivated by ethnic or religious hatred or political confrontation, sexual violence and killing of civilians and other grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in conflict regions such as Darfur. We cannot be neutral or indifferent when other human beings are suffering.

Slovakia is deeply concerned over continued blatant disrespect for international humanitarian law perpetrated by armed groups, state and non-state actors in armed conflicts against civilians. We welcome the continuing endeavour of the UN Security Council and the whole international community to strengthen the protection of civilians, and especially of the most vulnerable groups like women and children.

The international community must continue to adopt and implement feasible measures to put an end to such grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law. The establishment of a culture of protection, which Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for a few years ago, is becoming a reality and the implementation of the principle "Responsibility to Protect" outlined during the World Summit this September into the international legal system is without doubts a major step forward. Further elaboration of the principle "Responsibility to Protect" and its bringing into life should continue also through a new UNSC resolution on protection of civilians.

World leaders agreed that the international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help states to exercise their responsibility and support the efforts of the UN to establish an early warning capability. These commitments must be reflected in practical measures. In this regard, we welcome activities of OCHA as a part of its advocacy and dissemination work on

the protection of civilians in armed conflict organized with support of the Security Council and interested Member States through a series of regional workshops on protection of civilians in an effort to broaden the audience for protection policies and mainstream them within Member States' decision-making processes.

On the other hand, the UNSC, as the organ with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, has a special role in addressing the issue and in strengthening the response capabilities of the international community. It must ensure immediate, decisive and rapid reaction to emerging situations of massive attacks on civilians and their livelihood. Political questions or selfish national interests should not be an obstacle for the international community to act through the UNSC, including through the application of the principle "R2P", especially in situations when governmental institutions are unable or unwilling to implement feasible measures for protection of civilians.

Of course, the international community must be equipped with credible and effective legal and coercive instruments.

Mr. President,

Only a few days ago, on 7 December, in the region of Western Darfur, militias attacked the City of Congo Harasa and destroyed all water wells built by humanitarian workers. Even in cases when there is no direct armed attack, civilians might starve to death and suffer from grave shortage of water supply. Therefore, the attacks on basic infrastructure, necessary for survival, such as sources of drinking water and crops, should also be considered as direct attacks against civilians. The international community should not only condemn attacks that target the very livelihood of people, but also prosecute those who perpetrate such inhumane acts.

The Slovak Republic, as an in-coming non-permanent member of the UNSC, considers the issue of protection of civilians one of its priorities and will devote an increased amount of attention to these questions during its tenure.

Thank you, Mr. President.