



THE PERMANENT MISSION OF
SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

333 East 38th Street
9th Floor
New York, NY 10016
Tel: (212) 213-5583
Fax: (212) 692-2498
E-mail: pmun@southafrica-newyork.net

STATEMENT BY

**MS BONGIWE QWABE
COUNSELLOR**

**SECURITY COUNCIL
OPEN DEBATE
ON THE
PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS**

**NEWYORK
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Mr President,

My delegation wishes to thank you for convening this Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts, and would like to commend the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr John Holmes, for his briefing.

Despite positive political developments to achieve peace in many conflict areas, our world still continues to be ravaged by violent armed conflicts that claim the lives of thousands of civilians and leaving even more permanently displaced. The deliberate targeting of civilians in armed conflicts, together with the indiscriminate use of force, gender-based violence, forced displacement and the lack of safety and access of humanitarian personnel, all have a detrimental effect on civilians.

We are therefore of the view that finding a common solution to the protection of civilians would need the cooperation of each Member State and all parties involved in the conflict. We support the need for a coherent, comprehensive and coordinated approach by the principal organs of the United Nations, cooperating with one another and within their respective mandates when dealing with the issue of the protection of civilians. General Assembly Resolution 46/182, amongst others, highlights the important value that humanitarian assistance should be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality and consequently that assistance should not be given due to geopolitical considerations.

We should therefore avoid the politicization of humanitarian assistance and in this context, we urge the international community that they should not ignore the occupied Palestinian territory in Gaza. Just yesterday, Mr David Shearer, the Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the occupied Palestinian territory, told reporters at the UN that the humanitarian situation in the Gaza strip could worsen unless Israel eases the restrictions and closures at its border crossings with the area. South Africa supports the call by OCHA for the reopening of Karni crossing, the main commercial crossing point into Gaza.

Mr President,

It would be recalled that during our Presidency of the Council in March 2007, South Africa introduced an Open Debate for greater co-operation and co-ordination with regional organisations and the Security Council, in particular the African Union. We believe that the protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance would be better addressed in partnership with regional mechanisms and that strengthening dialogue and co-operation between the Security Council and regional organisations would contribute to tackling common security challenges. Furthermore, the role of regional organisations should be strengthened to act more effectively when future conflicts may arise as they are closer to the area of concern and can thus, in principle, act more speedily.

As stipulated in Security Council Resolution 1265 (1999) on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, the Council has expressed its willingness to consider how peacekeeping mandates might better address the negative impact of conflict on civilians. We are therefore pleased to note that UN peacekeeping mandates now include specific protection needs of women and children, including that of humanitarian personnel due to the Council's adoption of landmark resolutions on women,

peace and security (1325), children and armed conflict (1612), and the protection of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel in conflict zones (1502).

In conclusion, Mr President,

The four resolutions the Security Council has passed on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict have established a good framework for the international community to actively and collectively address the challenges of protecting civilians in armed conflict. These resolutions reaffirmed the importance of preventing armed conflict and its recurrence, while stressing the need for a comprehensive approach through the promotion of economic growth, poverty eradication, sustainable development, national reconciliation, good governance, democracy, the rule of law and the respect of, and protection of human rights.

In addressing violations of international humanitarian law, South Africa supports the work of the International Criminal Court and the various international tribunals and believes that all perpetrators, regardless of nationality and geopolitical status, should be properly and fairly tried. It is therefore hoped that addressing the challenges of protecting civilians in armed conflict would be done in a way that would increase respect for the principles of international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, human dignity and the legitimacy of the United Nations.

I thank you, Mr President.