

Statement by Ambassador Wittig in the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict

May 10, 2011

(As delivered)

Mr. President,

Let me thank our briefers of today for their valuable contributions.

Germany aligns itself with the EU statement to be delivered later on.

Today's debate on the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict comes at a crucial moment. Only last week the International Criminal Court announced its intention to indict three Libyan officials it holds responsible for organized crimes against humanity perpetrated against civilians in Libya. Following the landmark Security Council resolution 1970, this is an important step in enhancing accountability for violations of international law and to ending the so-called "culture of impunity".

Regarding "responsibility to protect", let me be clear: It is first and foremost the responsibility of each state to protect its civilian population from violence. However, blatant disregard of this obligation may have consequences for those responsible - this is a message that applies not only in Libya. It goes beyond Libya.

Mr. President,

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the violence in armed conflict. Recent events in Cote d'Ivoire and Libya re-confirmed this in a tragic way. The indiscriminate and excessive use of force against civilians in all its various forms cannot and must not be accepted by the Security Council and the international community at large.

Let me briefly touch upon some of the other situations of concern to us.

First on Syria: We are deeply shocked by the violence and the brutality of the internal repression against unarmed and peaceful protesters orchestrated by the Syrian authorities. The use of tanks and heavy artillery against the civilian population in Daraa, Baniyas and other cities are deeply worrying. The Syrian authorities clearly stand at a fork in the road. We strongly urge the Syrian government to end its military repression against its own population and to respect human rights. Those responsible for the killings should be held accountable.

In order to make this message clear, we have worked for the European Union to impose restrictive measures against Syria and against persons responsible for the violent repression. These measures have come into force today. The ongoing violence and the regional implications also require that we continue to address the situation in Syria in the Security Council.

On Afghanistan, we remain seriously concerned about the intolerably high number of conflict-related civilian casualties. The large majority of them are caused by indiscriminate attacks by the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other violent armed groups. We would also like to take note of the continued progress made by Afghan and international forces in minimizing civilian casualties. The situation of the civilian population in Somalia, remains a cause of grave concern, as are the ongoing activities by the Lord s Resistance Army, in particular the abduction of children, in parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo , southern Sudan and the Central African Republic. On Sri Lanka, Germany welcomes the report of the Panel of Experts. The report reiterates the need for accountability in Sri Lanka. The findings of the report should encourage the Government of Sri Lanka to set up a credible investigation and accountability process. We urge Sri Lanka to closely co-operate with United Nations in this regard.

Mr. President,

Since the last open debate on protection issues in November last year, the Security Council has further developed its comprehensive normative framework on protection issues. We note with appreciation that already four out of the current seven United Nations Peacekeeping Operations with a protection mandate have developed comprehensive strategies for the protection of civilians.

Mr. President,

Heeding the call of our President and for the sake of brevity I shorten my written statement and conclude by drawing the attention of the Council to one group of civilians with particular protection needs in all armed conflict – children. Children are sexually abused, killed and/or maimed and sometimes even used as suicide bombers by parties to conflict. In armed conflicts, schools and hospitals, which are essential for the development and well-being of children are deliberately attacked and destroyed .

Together with the SRSG, Ms. Coomaraswamy, with UNICEF and other UN agencies, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which I have the honor to chair, has since its inception in 2006 made tangible progress in demobilizing child soldiers and in enhancing compliance with international law by State and non-State parties to conflict. Please allow me to urge the members of the Council, as well as the wider UN membership, to continue to lend their valuable support to this common endeavour.

Thank You