

Italy -- Statement at the Seventh Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Gianlorenzo Cornado, Charge d'Affaires a.i. of Italy to the United Nations

Security Council

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Mr. President, Thank you for taking the initiative of convening this debate. Let me also express my appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his thorough briefing on the progress achieved and ongoing concerns in the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. We endorse the five-core-challenges approach referred to by the Secretary-General's report.

Italy fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. I will touch on points of particular interest to my Government, keeping in mind my Country's recent experience as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. Italy is proud to have been one of the co-sponsors of resolution 1820, to whose drafting we actively contributed. Sexual violence as a tactic of war has emerged as one of the foremost threats to the civilian population in recent conflicts. Women and children bear the main brunt of this horrific practice. With resolution 1820, the Council has stated loud and clear that this is a matter of international peace and security to which the utmost attention must be paid. Parties to conflicts must immediately and effectively put an end to sexual violence and take special measures to protect women and children from it. Impunity must cease, and those responsible must be held accountable. We look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report on resolution 1820. We will read it with attention and consider its recommendations, hoping very much that the Council will act upon them to make further progress in protecting women and children. Whenever a peacekeeping operation is in place, civilians expect to be protected by UN forces. When this task is not fulfilled the Organization's credibility is at stake. Failure to prevent civilian casualties and to assure the safe return of refugees and child protection could engender mistrust and deception and, ultimately, put peacekeeping missions at risk. This is another reason why the protection of civilians should continue to be part of peacekeeping mandates and why peacekeepers should be properly trained and equipped. The ongoing revision of the peacekeeping doctrine is taking these developments into account. The concept of "robust peacekeeping" is now making its way in international seminars, the Secretariat's assessments, and Security Council debates.

Yet as the Secretary General's Report highlights, the protection of civilians is not only a military task: it is a more inclusive challenge. Every component of a peacekeeping mission – military, police, civil, gender, human rights, and child protection – has to contribute to achieving the "protection" goals.

During Italy's recent term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, we supported the inclusion of civilian protection clauses in peacekeeping mandates. We did not stop there. Together with the UN, the Italian Government hosted a symposium on child protection in armed conflicts in Rome three days ago. As the Italian Foreign Minister stated on

this occasion, the ultimate goal is to spread awareness among the international community on the impact of armed conflicts on civilians, especially children. As a concrete result of the event, joint training initiatives in this field are being considered by the Italian Government and DPKO. Just as peacekeeping operations require instruments that are not only military in nature, international criminal jurisdiction should be viewed increasingly as a complementary instrument in the repression of international crimes. It is the States, by adapting their laws and jurisdictions, that should be the first to respond to serious breaches of law such as war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in their territories.

At the same time it is up to States – through collaboration with the ICRC and other institutions competent in the field – to raise awareness of the basic principles and the importance of international humanitarian law, especially in the armed forces. We are convinced that the protection of civilians requires further efforts to prevent the destabilizing accumulation of conventional weapons and to minimize as much as possible their humanitarian impact.

Italy is therefore on the forefront of the fight against the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and is actively engaged in the UN process towards a legally binding Arms Trade Treaty establishing international standards (including the respect for international humanitarian law and human rights) for the transfers of conventional weapons. Italy also strongly supports universal adherence and full implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (in particular its Protocol V on explosive remnants of war), as well as the early entry into force of the Convention banning the cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians. I would like to conclude on a more general note by recalling resolution 1674's reaffirmation of the principle of the responsibility to protect, a cardinal achievement of the United Nations. This principle implies that sovereignty brings special responsibilities: Governments must protect their own populations and the best way for them to do so is to promote human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance. Only when a Government is unable or unwilling to do so should the international community intervene. The responsibility to protect should not be perceived in a confrontational manner; it should be seen instead as an instrument available to the international community to overcome crises, provided that the conditions referred to in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the Summit Outcome Document are met. In this framework, the debate on the report of the Secretary General, will be a timely opportunity to build on the consensus achieved at the 2005 World Summit and concretely implement R2P. Italy intends to actively participate in this debate.

Thank you Mr. President.

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