

## □ Sixteenth Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians: 12 February 2014

On Wednesday 12 February, the United Nations Security Council held its first open debate of 2014 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (POC). Broadly, POC refers to measures, grounded in universally accepted obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL), and refugee law, which can be taken to protect the safety of civilians during times of war. The discussion narrowed its focus to one of the [five core protection challenges](#) identified by the Secretary-General in 2009: strengthening protection by UN peacekeeping and other missions. The primary overarching theme was how to build capacity surrounding implementation of the existing normative framework on POC in country-specific situations. States overwhelmingly acknowledged the need to invest more in mediation, diplomacy, and active prevention.

Sixty-two delegations participated in the debate, with briefings by High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay (via VTC), Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, and Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Yves Daccord also. Amos and Pillay both

[addressed](#)

the need for continued engagement to increase coordination of peacekeeping missions, with Pillay

[discussing](#)

the current partnership of her office with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in this capacity. Additionally, Amos emphasized the importance of the civilian contribution to operations, with many later speakers echoing this need to take into account local context and involve those who know the situation on the ground best. Ladsous and Pillay made initial remarks on the ‘

[Rights up Front](#)

’ initiative, presented by Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson on 17 December 2013 to ensure that “human rights awareness and knowledge permeate the UN system.” They discussed how this aids in the recognition of early warning signs and improves UN preparation when those prevention efforts fail. This initiative found support in many Member States’ statements, including

[Estonia](#)

,

[Germany](#)

, Turkey, Mexico,

[Chile](#)

, and

[Luxembourg](#)

.

At least ten States made explicit their support for the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP), including

incoming Council members

[Chile](#)

and

[Lithuania](#)

. As Australia

[noted](#)

, the primary responsibility to protect civilians rests with all parties to conflict, declaring that “this is a responsibility this Council needs to uphold.”

[Croatia](#)

maintained that this was a “vital part of efforts needed to prevent civilians from suffering.” Many others, including Mexico, Belgium, and

[Liechtenstein](#)

, showed support in backing France’s

[proposal](#)

of the voluntary suspension of the right to veto in cases of mass crimes. And finally, the

[Netherlands](#)

, affirming their close relationship of shared legal and normative foundations, distinguished RtoP from POC as more narrowly concerned with the four crimes and violations of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, applying regardless of whether an armed conflict is active.

The outcome of the debate was the release of a

[Presidential Statement](#)

, whereby the Council reaffirmed its commitment to the range of relevant measures it has adopted since POC became a thematic issue in 1999. The statement calls for further engagement by senior mission leadership to involve all levels of the command chain in the protection mandate, as well as for the UN to better correspond and collaborate with regional and sub regional institutions to better the implementation and achievement of civilian protection. Importantly, it noted that "

States bear the primary responsibility

to respect and ensure the human rights of their citizens, as well as all individuals within their territory as provided for by relevant international law and reaffirms the responsibility of each individual State to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity."

Located under ‘

[government statements](#)

, ICRtoP has compiled the transcripts of deliveries by Member States during the POC debate that referenced RtoP. Please also view the UN’s

[summary](#)

and relevant

[statements](#)

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For information of previous open debates on protection of civilians, please click [here](#) .