

**Senior UN officials call on Security Council to boost protection of civilians UN News Centre August 2013 19**

The international community must step up efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict, and ensure that those responsible for war crimes are prosecuted, United Nations senior officials told the Security Council in a meeting that coincides with World Humanitarian Day.

“Every day, humanitarian workers protect, feed, shelter, educate, heal and assist millions of people, regardless of who or where they are,”

[Secretary-General](#)

Ban Ki-moon

[told](#)

the Council’s open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. “It is an outrage that our colleagues and partners should be attacked for providing these essential services.” (...)

Mr. Ban said he was particularly concerned about the use of explosive weapons such as roadside bombs, air strikes and artillery in populated areas, which can kill and maim, having profound humanitarian consequences.

In this regard, he reiterated his call to the Council and Member States to work through the UN General Assembly to recognize and act on this critical issue. “We need to better understand the types of explosive weapons that are most problematic. We need to examine how existing international law can help regulate use. And we need to consider the concrete steps that can be taken to reduce the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas.” he said.

Mr. Ban also noted the precarious humanitarian situations in Syria, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Mali, and stressed that international community must increase its relief efforts in these countries.

In her address to the Council, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay echoed Mr. Ban’s call for increased relief efforts, and emphasized the importance of tackling impunity.

“Providing humanitarian access and ensuring accountability for violations of global human rights and humanitarian law are not only moral imperatives, but also legal requirements,” Ms. Pillay said.

She added that impunity undermines the fabric of societies and was detrimental to any lasting solution to instability, and stressed that countries must adopt the necessary measures for to address this issue in compliance with global standards.

Ms. Pillay said her Office (

[OHCHR](#)

) is currently supporting commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions on Syria, DRC, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and underlined that these are important to determine whether human rights violations have occurred and inform appropriate responses.

In addition, Ms. Pillay voiced concern over human rights implications for the protection of civilians of armed drone strikes carried out in the context of counter-terrorism in Gaza, Pakistan and Yemen, among other countries. The current lack of transparency surrounding their use creates an “accountability vacuum” and affects the ability of victims to seek redress, she said, urging all relevant States “to clarify the legal bases for such strikes as well as the safeguards in place to ensure compliance with applicable international law.”

In her remarks to the open debate, delivered via a teleconference from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos highlighted the complex working conditions that humanitarians face every day, and called for increased access so they can increase assistance to those who need it the most.

“I am extremely concerned by the failure to protect civilians in flagrant violation of the most basic rules of international humanitarian law and human rights law,” she said, referring to the situation in Syria, where insecurity, coupled with bureaucratic constraints and other limitations, continue to prevent aid from reaching all those in need.(...)

While the main responsibility to prosecute human rights violations and ensure accountability lies with national authorities, Ms. Amos said that the UN and its Member States play an important role in providing financial and technical support to conduct investigations and prosecutions.

“National accountability mechanisms can also be complemented by the more regular and systematic use of commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions by the Security Council,” she said.

“As we have seen in the evolution of situations requiring humanitarian response around the world, it is clear that the concept of arbitrary denial of consent for humanitarian operations requires greater legal development and policy attention, including from this Council,” Ms. Amos concluded.

Read the [full article](#).

*The Secretary-General also made reference to the RtoP concept, saying that Governments “have the primary responsibility for protection”. See a transcript of the SG’s remarks [here](#)*