Fifteenth Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians: 19 August 2013   On Monday 19 August, World Humanitarian Day, the United Nations Security Council held its third open debate of 2013 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (POC). POC has been a thematic issue on the Security Council agenda since 1999 and focuses on the protection obligations and capacities of governments and the role of the Council in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons, and women and children in armed conflict. The purpose of this debate was to contribute to a discussion by the Council and the broader membership in anticipation of the next report of the Secretary-General, expected on 17 November 2013.

The debate focused on the following points: enhancing compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law; ensuring humanitarian access to affected populations; and strengthening accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

53 delegations participated in the debate. During his opening remarks, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
 reminded
delegations that "Protecting civilians demands timely political action and prevention. It means helping governments -- who have primary responsibility for protection -- to build the necessary capacity." The Secretary-General was followed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay (both by video-conference), as well as the International Committee of Red Cross Director for International Law and Cooperation, Philip Spoerri.

During the debate, several Member States referenced the Responsibility to Protect. Australia
 stated
that "Protecting civilians is primarily a national responsibility. But where national authorities fail and mass atrocity crimes occur, the international community – including this Council – must be prepared to act to meet our responsibility to protect." The United States
 noted
that, while the protection of civilians was the primary responsibility of states, "it is clear that the international community must keep our attention focused sharply on the practical steps we can take to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict and we must redouble our efforts to ensure that this Council is not sitting on the sidelines when civilian populations are in grave danger." Brazil
 declared
that prevention was the most effective strategy to protect civilians, a belief echoed by Pakistan and Spain, who
 asserted
that the protection of civilians required the adoption of measures to "prevent, protect and punish".

Several delegations, including the
UK
, Brazil, U.S.,
Malaysia
, Estonia,
EU
, Uganda, Spain, Armenia and Croatia, declared that establishing a culture of accountability would be essential for ensuring the protection of civilians. Hungary
noted
that the lack of accountability established "a breeding ground for future atrocities." Other States, including Guatemala, the Russian Federation, and Azerbaijan advocated for the need to strengthen the capacity of governments to protect populations.

ICRtoP compiled those interventions delivered during the POC debate which referenced the Responsibility to Protect on its website. Please also view the UN's
summary
and relevant
statements
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