

United Nations Security Council
20 November 2007

Following is the text of remarks by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the Security Council during its debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, today, 20 November:

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to you for chairing this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Today is a fitting day for such a meeting. On this day in 1945, the Trial of the Major War Criminals began at Nuremberg. The Nuremberg Trials had a profound influence on the development of international law. They had an important bearing on the notion of individual criminal responsibility for atrocities committed against civilians in armed conflict. They underlined that, even in war, certain acts are unacceptable. And they reflected the world's conviction that civilians are entitled to protection.

Sixty-two years later, civilians continue to pay a dreadful toll in today's conflicts -- in Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

In these and other conflicts, large numbers of civilians -- women, girls, boys and men -- suffer unimaginable violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

() That is why the protection of civilians is and must remain an absolute priority. For me as Secretary-General. For the United Nations. For this Council. And, above all, for the Member States, with whom rests the primary responsibility for protecting civilians.

() At the World Summit in 2005, all the world's Governments agreed in principle to the **responsibility to protect**

. I will work with Member States and civil society to translate this concept from word to deed -- to ensure timely action when populations face genocide, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity.

This Council has taken a number of important steps -- including the adoption last year of resolution 1674 (2006) on the protection of civilians. The resolution establishes an important framework for action. Here too, we must now work together to translate the text into real action.

In my report, I have tried to show ways in which this may be done. The Emergency Relief Coordinator will elaborate on these recommendations in greater detail. However, allow me to mention one of the proposals -- the establishment of a Security Council working group on the protection of civilians.

I believe the establishment of such a group is an important next step, perhaps even an inevitable next step, in the evolution of the Council's consideration of the protection of civilians. It would not only underline the Council's commitment to this cause, it would give practical meaning to your commitment. It would ensure more timely and systematic consideration of the protection of civilians in the Council's deliberations. And it would assist the Council to move

decisively towards practical implementation.

And that, ultimately, is where the Council's words must have the most meaning -- on the ground, in support of the affected civilians who need protection from the shocking indignities of armed conflict.

The plight of children in armed conflict is particularly disturbing. () Every year, thousands of children are killed and wounded as a direct result of fighting. And the number of child soldiers around the world is estimated at 250,000.

() The Council has mandated peacekeeping operations to assist with the protection of civilians within the limits of their capabilities and areas of deployment. It is critical that peacekeeping operations be empowered with resources and political support to implement their mandates. I see Darfur as a test case, where all concerned must collectively meet the challenges of deploying an effective mission and achieving a peace agreement.

() I trust you will have a fruitful debate on this vital issue, which is key to achieving sustainable peace around the world.

Full text available:

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EGUA-795R6Z?OpenDocument>