

**REPUBLIC OF RWANDA**



STATEMENT

BY

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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

OPEN DEBATE ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED  
CONFLICT

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## **Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

1. I would like to commend you for convening this important debate on the Protection of Civilians and for the Presidential Statement just adopted.

2. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his informative briefing, as well as High Commissioner Pillay, and Mr. Spoerri for their valued contributions and briefings.

3. The protection of civilians is a very personal issue for my country. In 1994, a genocide claimed the lives of nearly a million Rwandans. Rwandans wince in sympathy when they see images of civilians under threat elsewhere in the world today.

4. Rwanda's core message today is that enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict requires action before a conflict starts. The proliferation of non-state armed groups makes civilian protection both more urgent, and harder to achieve. In particular, I wish to emphasize the importance of increasing investments in the professionalization of military and police forces, especially adequate training in the protection of civilians. Only when the leadership of armed forces shares the international community's preoccupation with civilian protection will decisive progress made.

5. As a result of the experience of Rwanda, we feel a moral obligation to participate as vigorously as possible in activities, such as UN peacekeeping operations, that increase protections for civilians in armed conflict. We also take very seriously all efforts, such as the one we are engaged in today, to strengthen international norms to reduce tolerance for such crimes.

6. In that regard, I would like to begin my remarks on a note of optimism. Significant progress has indeed been made in the evolution of international norms since the crimes in my country 19 years ago. Normative progress is slow, built year by year, resolution by resolution, almost imperceptibly. It can sometimes seem like we are just repeating ourselves, but the cumulative effect is dramatic. Each year, the consensus grows stronger that the protection of civilians and the prevention of war crimes and crimes against humanity are a fundamental duty of each State, as well as a legitimate and necessary focus of collective action in the international system.

7. The impetus to rethink international norms comes in large part from the effort to comprehend what happened in Rwanda. In 1994, the world's response to mass crimes was to withdraw international forces and in some cases to refuse outright to provide protection. Yet, I believe that the course of action adopted by the international community in 1994, and the concepts used to justify it, would not be acceptable today. Rwanda would be pleased if the end result of this process of introspection is a world that is much more resistant to mass atrocities. If we keep working together, I believe we can get there.

8. Evidence that progress is possible should encourage us to redouble our efforts. Yet we must not neglect the urgent challenges that confront us at this very moment. Civilians are at serious risk today in Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Council is likely to face new situations of armed conflict in the months and years ahead.

9. My country's experience explains why we are proud to co-chair, together with the Netherlands, the Group of Friends on the

Responsibility to Protect. Indeed, I would like to take this opportunity to connect our debate on the Protection of Civilians more concretely to the evolving norm of Responsibility to Protect.

10. Two features of this norm, as set out in Paragraph 138 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, have not been emphasized often enough: prevention and the danger of incitement. I believe that the best way to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflict is to move from a mindset of conflict management to one of prevention. Moreover, individual States and UN Peacekeeping missions must become more sensitive to often subtle forms of incitement that lay the groundwork for crimes against humanity, and work to curtail it before it is too late.

**Mr. President,**

11. I would like to address two further aspects of the core challenges identified by the Secretary-General in his 2009 report, namely:

- Enhancing the implementation of protection mandates by UN peacekeeping missions, and;
- Enhancing accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law

12. On peacekeeping, Rwanda welcomes the continued development of strategies to protect civilians and operational baselines through the guidance of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

13. Rwanda currently contributes to seven UN peacekeeping missions. In line with the lessons we learned rebuilding Rwanda after genocide, we do not approach peacekeeping as an exclusively

military task. We believe that early peacebuilding is critical to the success of these missions, and that adequate resources should be directed to complement uniformed personnel as they fulfill their mandate to protect civilians.

14. Effective measures need be neither costly nor controversial. For example, within their areas of patrol with UNAMID, in Darfur, Rwandan peacekeepers have introduced an energy-efficient stove that was developed in Rwanda in 2000 to protect the environment. Because these stoves use less firewood, women and children do not have to venture as far to collect it, reducing the risk of brutal attacks and rape that often accompany their search.

15. Another example is increasing the number of trained female peacekeepers. Female peacekeepers are often better able to intervene in specific situations concerning women and children, particularly in specific cultural contexts. Rwanda is a leading contributor of female police officers to UN peacekeeping missions and we have seen these officers combat gender-based violence and raise awareness in the communities they serve in ways that male peacekeepers are not able to do.

16. Ensuring that all necessary capabilities are deployed in support of peacekeepers is critical to their ability to protect civilian populations. At the end of 2012, Rwanda contributed military utility helicopters to the UN Mission in South Sudan, extending the Mission's area of influence and contributing to a safer environment for civilians.

17. We also support calls for peacekeeping missions to work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to preserve the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps.

18. On accountability for crimes against civilians, I wish to emphasize four important principles. First, justice must be timely. Nearly two decades after the genocide in Rwanda, the international judicial process has yet to conclude. Second, rendering justice to victims should be the only objective of accountability mechanisms; political considerations should have no place. Justice cannot be selective, nor can it be for political expediency. Third, more careful attention should be paid to the principle of subsidiarity when choosing the most appropriate venue for judicial proceedings. Justice is best rendered at home. Fourth, and related to subsidiarity, the international community should increase investment in strengthening national judicial capacities.

**Mr. President,**

19. I conclude by once again restating Rwanda's firm commitment to enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and we express gratitude to the women and men protecting those in need, especially in Africa, as well as those who have laid down their lives in the name of international peace and security.

20. I thank you.