

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on a matter that my delegation believes to be of particular importance, given its topical and sensitive nature. We are also grateful for the report by Mr. Holmes this morning.

The Security Council has provided the legal framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflict through its resolutions 1265 (1999), 1296 (2000) and 1674 (2006). This legal framework should be used to protect victims. The Security Council, in its resolution 1674 (2006), established that attacks deliberately targeting civilians or other protected individuals in situations of armed conflict represented a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law and condemned such practices most energetically.

This Council has also repeatedly required compliance with obligations under international law, in particular the provisions of the Hague Conventions, the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols, and the decisions of this Council. The Council has repeatedly condemned, in the most energetic terms, all acts of violence or abuse committed against civilians in situations of armed conflict in breach of the applicable international obligations, be it in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Darfur or the Middle East.

The recent political history of my country and its commitment to international law, international humanitarian law and respect for human rights prompt us to speak up on matters that occur in other places. We are particularly sensitive to the suffering of civilian populations, and we are of the view that the State apparatus is responsible for protecting citizens living in territories under its control.

In this context, the Republic of Argentina expresses its profound concern with regard to the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East. We condemn the excessive use of force by Israel in Gaza and the launching of rockets towards Israel from the Gaza Strip.

Full respect should be ensured for obligations in the context of international humanitarian law and all measures should be taken to protect the civilian population. The United Nations reports are eloquent: the number of civilians who have died as a result of bombings and land operations is horrific. This must stop.

Humanitarian conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories are also cause for special concern for our countries. The international community should take urgent steps to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian population. Israel must also contribute to that end by allowing humanitarian personnel immediate and secure access.

The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is alarming. In the current circumstances, international assistance cannot reach the affected population. If we do not act urgently, a major humanitarian crisis could ensue, potentially affecting more than 1.5 million Palestinians. We know that various coordination efforts are being considered to provide assistance in the area. Argentina is preparing a significant package of humanitarian assistance for Gaza. We are prepared to join our efforts with those of the international community. Our country is also prepared to contribute to official assistance, in particular

by providing personnel from our White Helmets initiative and placing specialized teams of trained volunteers able to act as reserves at the disposal of the United Nations humanitarian system.

The Government of Argentina strongly emphasizes that this is the time for diplomacy. The inclination towards bellicose action should be abandoned. A negotiated way out of the crisis should be supported, including the urgent establishment of an unconditional ceasefire that allows the international community to immediately set up a humanitarian truce to make it possible to help people at risk.