

Mr. Hill (Australia): Thank you, Sir, for convening this important debate. We welcome the opportunity to engage on this issue in the Council. This thematic debate is a valuable opportunity for the Council and the broader membership to take a step back from the task of implementation in country-specific situations and to consider the issue in a more strategic fashion.

In this regard, we commend the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Council in updating the aide-memoire on the protection of civilians. We also thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his comprehensive briefing in this regard earlier today.

Given the constraints of time, I will focus my remarks on three areas of importance for Australia.

First, I would like to turn to the mandated task of protecting civilians, which has increasingly become a central feature of United Nations peacekeeping. Recent events in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have highlighted the critical importance of this mandated task. These events demonstrated the expectations of host populations and the international community associated with a protection mandate and they also starkly illustrated the constraints and challenges faced by United Nations peacekeepers. The Council is to be commended for its clarity in renewing the mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the authorization of additional capacity.

The challenge remains, however, in implementation. Too often we have witnessed a disconnect between the political understanding reached in the Council and the practical reality on the ground. At times, this disconnect is due to capacity constraints. At other times, it is due to different interpretations of the mandate and the absence of a common understanding regarding the types of tasks permitted and required by the mandate. This disconnect between

the strategic and operational levels needs to be reconciled in order to ensure that reasonable expectations are being set and that United Nations peacekeeping remains a dynamic and effective instrument of international peace and security.

As a contribution to addressing this challenge, Australia, in partnership with Uruguay, will host a one-day workshop on 27 January focused on the implementation of protection of civilian tasks in peacekeeping missions. The workshop is intended to provide a forum for dialogue among Member States, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations with a view to promoting a common understanding of the challenges faced in the implementation of such mandates. In so doing, we hope to work towards closing the gap between mandate and implementation. We invite all Member States to participate in the workshop and to contribute to addressing this important challenge.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize the need to end impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. As the Secretary-General noted in his 2007 report (S/2007/643), where we are unable to prevent such abuses, we must at the

very least ensure that the perpetrators and those who bear political responsibility for violence against civilians are held accountable for their actions. This is particularly the case in relation to sexual and gender-based violence. We must renew our commitment to ending impunity for such crimes.

Finally, I would like to touch briefly on the principle of the responsibility to protect. We look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report on the responsibility to protect in the coming days. We expect the report to contribute to a shared conceptual understanding of the principle that was agreed by our leaders at the 2005 World Summit and to a shared appreciation of what is required on the part of Member States and the United Nations to implement the principle.

While implementation of the responsibility to protect requires action by a wide range of actors, the World Summit Outcome and the Charter of the United Nations give the Security Council a specific role to play in its implementation. To prevent mass atrocity crimes, the Council must ensure it uses the means at its disposal in timely and innovative ways. To take forward the Council's role, there is a need for it to be more receptive to early warning information from a wide range of sources, more willing to put country situations in which people are at risk on its agenda, and more prepared to take early action designed to address the situation at hand. And Member States, of course, need to support such Council action.

We trust that all Member States can agree on the central premise that underlies this debate, namely, that civilians deserve our protection. Australia remains committed to working with partners in the international community to ensure that this premise is realized.