

Statement by H.E. Mr Gary Quinlan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations Security Council regarding the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, as delivered on 7 July 2010.

(as delivered)

Madame President,

Australia very much appreciates the opportunity – especially under your presidency – to discuss this critical issue before the Council today. First, I'd like to thank the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Madame Pillay, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Sir John Holmes, for their presentations. It is essential that the Council –and the UN system generally – keeps this matter in front of its purview. I especially want to recognise the role of USG Holmes in helping – candidly – to keep us honest about this imperative, which goes to the core of why we created the United Nations.

The presentations today remind us, tellingly, that the plight of civilians in modern conflict remains dire. From the numbers of internally displaced persons, to the horrifying statistics on sexual violence – it is clear that the international community needs to do much more to ensure innocent and vulnerable civilians in armed conflict situations are protected. Given time constraints, I would like to focus my remarks on one aspect discussed in the briefings provided today: the issue of protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations.

When the Council debated this issue in November last year, there was a wide gap in the understanding among Member States on the meaning of protection of civilians in the context of a peacekeeping operation. The development of a draft operational concept late last year, in response to calls from the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Security Council in its Resolution 1894, was a significant step forward in closing this gap. This year, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, subsequently requested the UN Secretariat to develop a strategic framework containing elements and parameters for mission-specific strategies to guide senior mission leadership, to develop training modules, and to outline resource and capability requirements.

As part of Australia's own continuing engagement on this practical agenda, we've been pleased to engage with other Member States to further contribute to the efforts of peacekeepers to protect civilians. In January, we were pleased to again partner with Uruguay in hosting a workshop to discuss the recommendations of the DPKO-OCHA Commissioned Independent Study on Protection of Civilians with our colleagues in New York. In April, as one of 17 member countries of the Challenges Partnership, Australia hosted the Third International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations which examined the "Challenges of Strengthening the Protection of Civilians in Multidimensional Peace Operations". Most recently, Australia has also been pleased to support UNIFEM, UN Action and DPKO in the development of an analytical inventory for peacekeepers to respond to conflict related sexual violence. The inventory was launched in New York last week.

As noted by the Joint Special Representative for UNAMID, Professor Gambari, at the recent General Assembly thematic debate on peacekeeping, regional organisations also have a critical role in UN peacekeeping efforts. Australia has therefore been pleased to work with the African Union, to assist with the consideration of draft guidelines on protection of civilians for AU Peace Support Operations.

Madame President,

Despite some of the positive normative developments to support the ability of peacekeepers to protect civilians when mandated to as part of a peacekeeping operation, the deteriorating situation on the ground – which has been plainly made

clear to us – means there is significant work that still needs to be done to ensure that what we now judge to be our shared understanding of what protection of civilians means actually results in improved conditions for civilians on the ground.

The draw downs in recent peacekeeping operations have been highlighted by many speakers before the Council today. Both the Council and the host government have critical roles to play in ensuring that civilians are protected, including during mission draw downs. For its part, the Council must clearly articulate its expectations of the peacekeepers it is mandating to protect civilians. Our peacekeepers on the ground are asking unambiguously for this clarity and guidance. This doesn't necessarily mean the development of more lengthy, detailed or intricate mandates. In turn, the development of measurable benchmarks will go a long way toward ensuring implementation of the mandate, and management of expectations.

As we look to the future, Australia is encouraged by the work underway to develop a strategic framework and mission-wide strategies to ensure peacekeepers are better able to protect civilians. This is a marked improvement on the tools available to implement protection of civilian mandates a decade ago. But we must not lose sight of the reality that these developments will be of limited value without direction from the Security Council, and with the support of Member States, to ensure all those involved in the formulation, development and implementation of peacekeeping operations that have a protection of civilians mandates, have the guidance, training and resources necessary to ensure peacekeeping lives up to its expectations – expectations that we all demand.

To conclude Madam President, peacekeeping is one tool to improve the lives of civilians afflicted by conflict on the ground. Peacekeeping missions have a special responsibility for the physical protection of civilians. It is therefore critical that we continue to support these endeavours. And frankly, that we do a much better job to do this.

Thank you.