

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): My delegation fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union (EU). We would like to make a few observations based on our two years of experience on the Security Council.

We listened with great interest to the statement made by Mr. Holmes. He gave us a briefing that very clearly illustrates that there is still much progress to be made in the area of the protection of civilians.

International humanitarian law is not observed in the course of hostilities in numerous conflicts. The current situation in Gaza is a strikingly tragic illustration of that. Civilians are forgotten when Hamas utilizes residential buildings, schools and hospitals to fire from and uses the civilians around them as human shields. Civilians are equally forgotten, however, when the Israeli army places its military goals above strict adherence to international humanitarian law. The civilian population is thereby twice victimized. In that regard, we call for the immediate implementation of resolution 1860 (2008).

The horrors of numerous wars prompted the international community to develop humanitarian law as we know it today, including with regard to the protection of civilians in conflict situations. Likewise, the mass atrocities committed against civilian populations, even in non-conflict situations, have led to the emergence of the idea of the responsibility to protect. Belgium cherishes that concept, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2005, for it emphasizes the duty of each State to protect its population against the clearly identified ultimate crimes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

As the body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, the Security Council has adopted civilian protection as an objective, as established by humanitarian law. The Council must also now integrate fully the notion of the responsibility to protect into its work. It already does so in a number of ways: by instituting good offices missions, fighting impunity, combating the use of child soldiers and through the Peace building Commission. The Council did so recently on 22 December in resolution 1857 (2008), which revised the mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council could have done so even more resolutely and with greater conviction, given the extreme gravity of the crimes it seeks to prevent and that such crimes are firmly identified in international penal law. My country will continue to advocate to that end and to encourage our Organization to establish the early warning instruments and rapid response mechanisms vital to avoiding more mass atrocities.

Belgium welcomes today's scheduled adoption of a presidential statement complemented by an update of the aide-memoire on the protection of civilians. This document remains a significant reference point for the Council's daily work. In this context, we also wish to welcome the eminent establishment of a group of experts which, on a relatively informal basis, will discuss aspects related to protection of civilians in each mandate up for renewal by the Council. This will contribute to creating a more systematic approach to the aspects related to the protection of civilians.

Finally, we believe that combating impunity is a vital factor of the protection of civilians. The Council must also make a contribution thereto through its different instruments, such as its sanctions committees. The Security Council and its sanctions regimes must do a better job of shouldering their responsibilities by punishing such phenomena as sexual violence or the recruitment of and serious violence done to children.