

**Mr. Montoya** (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Sir, for your work as President of the Security Council and for your initiative to convene this debate on an issue to which my Government ascribes particular importance. We would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General John Holmes for his informative briefing. We welcome the support that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other bodies of the United Nations system have provided to Colombia in the tasks of attending to the civilian population and protecting their rights.

The Government of Colombia has prioritized, through our democratic security policy, the objective of promoting conditions that guarantee the protection and full enjoyment of the rights of all persons living in our country. This has allowed for significant progress in terms of citizens' security, such as the reduction in the rate of extortive kidnappings to its lowest point in the past 20 years, the reduction to zero of the number of towns taken by groups outside the law and the consolidation of the State presence and security forces throughout the country. The task of protecting the population has been carried out through policies and continuous actions that involve various State entities.

In terms of dealing with displaced persons, Colombia has continued to strengthen its national assistance policy. In 2008, 260,000 displaced families were registered in the Families in Action programme, which allows resources to be allocated for social welfare. In addition, 86,000 displaced families were registered during the same period in income-generating programmes. The management of the assets earmarked for the Fund for the Reparation of Victims of Violence has also begun. The Fund will benefit victims identified by the judicial authorities through a process being carried out within the framework of the Peace and Justice Law.

The Government of Colombia reaffirms its condemnation of any action aimed against the civilian population. The protection of the civilian population and strict compliance with international humanitarian law and other relevant international norms are matters of absolute priority.

Ten years after the Security Council first began holding thematic debates on the protection of civilians in conflict, there is still no clear conceptual understanding of this issue. In this regard, the aide-memoire for the consideration of matters relating to the protection of civilians, soon to be adopted, is a useful instrument to guide the work of this body in formulating and following up on this issue in peacekeeping operations. We believe that it is appropriate that the Security Council has adopted an approach focusing the scope of the aide-memoire on such operations, looking at one case at a time and bearing in mind the specific circumstances of each situation.

From this perspective, it is essential to underline that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with each State and that, in turn, States can request international support when they deem necessary. In this context, the United Nations and the international community in general have a supporting role to play in national protection efforts. Humanitarian assistance, in order to be reliable and predictable, must be carried out in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and in conformity with humane principles and the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Colombia supports the operational work of the United Nations for the protection of civilians. To this end, adequate cooperation between the Security Council and other relevant United Nations bodies must be maintained. In particular, the role of the General Assembly as the appropriate body for adopting policy guidelines in the humanitarian field must be strengthened.

Furthermore, my delegation would like to highlight the urgent need to establish effective controls for the illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons as indispensable to better protection for civilian populations. For my country, that illicit trade, which is of an international nature, represents a serious

problem, as it threatens civilian security, increases crime rates and results in the death or permanent disability of thousands of persons.

Likewise, the Government of Colombia highlights the importance of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which was mentioned today by the Under-Secretary-General. Colombia is one of the countries that signed the Convention at the conference held to that end in Oslo in December 2008. With this decision, the Government of Colombia reiterated its commitment to respect for human rights and international humanitarian law and its willingness to face the problem of weapons that have a humanitarian impact.

Colombia supports efforts aimed at providing protection to civilian population and guaranteeing their rights, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law, including international humanitarian law. We will shortly celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions. In the lead-up to that commemoration, the Government of Colombia reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the norms established in those important instruments.

My delegation will maintain an active participation in future discussions on this issue and its ongoing willingness to promote the treatment of this issue by the various bodies and institutions of the United Nations.