

Statement by His Excellency Gilles Rivard, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to the Security Council Meeting on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

9 November 2011

Mr. President,

I would like to thank Portugal for convening this open debate. Canada welcomes the opportunity to focus on accountability issues related to the protection of civilians. The evolving situation in Libya and ongoing protection challenges in countries such as Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Cote d'Ivoire and Afghanistan demonstrate the need for sustained international attention to meet the protection needs of populations affected by violence and armed conflict.

Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including rape as a weapon of war and other acts of sexual violence, continue to occur at an alarming rate. Those who commit them must be held to account for their actions.

The Secretary General in his November 2010 report - has identified a number of key recommendations with respect to enhancing accountability to better protect civilians. I would like to draw attention to a number of issues and country specific contexts that we see being of particular importance.

First, it is important that we acknowledge that progress has been made in advancing a legal framework for civilian protection. This has allowed us to take decisive action to protect civilians. Libya offers a key example of how the international community can successfully work together to achieve a common purpose. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 mandated the use of all necessary means to protect civilians under threat of attack in Libya. Resolution 1973 and, before that, 1970 sent a clear message to the previous Libyan regime and to the wider international community that deliberate and targeted attacks against civilian populations and gross violations of human rights will carry serious consequences. Canada is proud to have played a key role in Libya both politically and militarily to protect civilians against a cruel and oppressive regime.

Yet despite this success, all-too-often, implementation gaps remain in ensuring that our collective words of support are effectively translated into concrete actions. The Council must continue to exercise the range of options it has at its disposal to prevent and stop violence against civilians in armed conflicts including mediation and diplomatic missions, sanctions, UN mandated missions and when required the use of force.

Second, Mr. President, it is also important that those who commit violent and deadly attacks against aid workers be brought to justice. The attack against UNHCR in Kandahar, Afghanistan, on October 31st, serves as a reminder of the great risks for those who work tirelessly to deliver humanitarian assistance. Three UNHCR staff tragically lost their lives in this attack. Our condolences go out to the families of the deceased. These attacks underscore the importance of continued and sustained cooperation between the international and Afghan security forces to ensure civilians are protected from indiscriminate acts of violence. Canada is proud to play a role in Afghanistan through efforts to train the Afghan National Security Forces so they are capable of protecting all civilians present in the country, while ensuring that those who target civilians are brought to justice.

Third, we must be persistent in denouncing violence directed against women and girls such as sexual violence, including rape as a weapon of war, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization. We will continue to promote the empowerment of women

and girls. In Afghanistan, for example, Canada has frequently stressed the need for the Afghan government to promote and protect human rights, including freedom of expression and religious belief. Canada is supporting programs that implement the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and help Afghan human rights institutions promote equal rights for all citizens and to investigate and act on violations.

Fourth, Mr. President, we must vigorously defend the rights of vulnerable religious minorities in situations of armed conflict who are persecuted for their religious beliefs. We also encourage key UN actors to develop strategies to better take into account the persecution of religious minorities with a view to preventing displacement. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable John Baird, highlighted in his address to the General Assembly that the Canadian government is in the process of establishing an Office of Religious Freedom within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. This office will serve to promote the protection of freedom of religion as a key objective of Canada's foreign policy.

Fifth, finding opportunities to strengthen accountability mechanisms in national jurisdictions is key to our success in the long-term. It is the primary responsibility of every state to investigate and prosecute those suspected of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The recent conviction of four former military officers for their role in a massacre of civilians during the armed conflict in Guatemala - the first such conviction against military officers in that country - is an example of national accountability mechanisms at work. This underlines the need for states to fulfill their obligations to investigate and prosecute persons suspected of serious international crimes, and where appropriate, cooperate with international institutions to ensure that those responsible face justice.

Finally, Mr. President, Canada also supports the call of the Secretary General for further work by Member States, UN agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to better understand and address the impact of explosive remnants of war in populated areas. Canada is supporting such efforts in concrete and meaningful ways. Most recently our Prime Minister announced that we will be contributing \$10 million Canadian dollars to help secure weapons of mass destruction and remove and dispose of explosive remnants of war in Libya. This is essential to ensuring civilians are protected and that Libya can move forward.

Mr. President, it is critical that we back our principles with concrete action. Vulnerable populations around the world deserve the UN Security Council's continued attention and sustained efforts. The Council can continue to rely on Canada to support its efforts to protect civilian populations and promote freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law around the world.

Thank you Mr. President.