

Statement of Columbia: Ninth Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 7 July 2010

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*):

Allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, for your work as President of the Security Council for this month, as well as to express our appreciation for the convening of this debate. We are grateful for the briefings made by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. My delegation would also like to express special appreciation to Under-Secretary- General John Holmes upon the end of his tenure to strengthen the humanitarian work of the United Nations.

The establishment of more concrete conditions for the protection of civilians and the enjoyment of their rights in the face of the violence committed by illegal armed groups is a priority for Colombia. The Government of my country has concentrated its efforts in reinforcing and ensuring the rule of law throughout our territory by implementing our democratic security policy. After eight years of implementation of that policy, we can assert that we have helped to reduce the gap between the formal recognition of rights and their effective implementation.

Strengthening democratic authority and State control over its territory have resulted in a dramatic reduction of all acts of violence and crime that deprive citizens of the enjoyment of their rights. In addition to those efforts, we have put in place a comprehensive policy on human rights and international humanitarian law, which includes effective preventive measures and ensures appropriate penalties in case of possible violations, including those involving members of the public security forces. An essential component of that effort by the Colombian Government has been the collective and individual demobilization of 51,407 members of illegal armed groups since 2002. That process, embodied in special legislation, has allowed for the implementation of principles of justice, truth and redress for victims.

Assistance to displaced persons continues to be one of the areas requiring greater attention from the Colombian State, and it poses ongoing challenges. To address them adequately, we have a legal and institutional framework and a comprehensive care policy for displaced persons, including humanitarian approaches to rights and social and economic integration. The allocation of resources to this policy significantly increased from 2007 to 2010, reaching annual averages of over \$500 million from the national budget.

This framework has been strengthened recently, given the needs on the ground and its established objectives. To this end, modifications were made to the policy components of prevention and protection; comprehensive assistance; truth, justice and redress; and the return or resettlement of displaced persons. The implementation of public policies in this area takes due account of the different

needs of people according to gender, ethnicity, age or disability. We have also designed mechanisms to ensure the effective participation of the displaced population through the adjustment, restatement or enhancement of public policies. Additionally, efforts have been made to coordinate programmes defined at the national level with those carried out by regional authorities at the local level, seeking to ensure that the regions adopt and coordinate the necessary measures in terms of budget and institutional capacity to assist the displaced population.

Colombia reaffirms its commitment to the Cartagena Action Plan adopted at the second Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction in December 2009. My country has undertaken a high-level presidential programme that coordinates and supervises the activities of the institutions responsible for implementing the Ottawa Convention.

The Colombian population has experienced the dire consequences of anti-personnel mines planted by illegal armed groups. The Government is working intensively on prevention and humanitarian demining. It also supports the affected communities through the recovery of productive lands, the return of their inhabitants, the reconstruction of the public services network, and physical and psychological rehabilitation aimed at facilitating the full social and economic reintegration of the victims.

Colombia reaffirms its support for efforts to protect civilians and ensure their rights, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and international legal norms. The activities of the Government of Colombia are guided by the essential premise that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with each State. Consequently, each State may turn to international support when necessary. In this context, the United Nations and the international community in general have a supporting role to play in the strengthening of national protection efforts.

My delegation wishes to stress the importance for the humanitarian system, in observing the principles that govern its actions, to avoid circumstances that could compromise the neutrality, impartiality and independence of its work. These principles are of particular significance in the case of possible contact of humanitarian actors with illegal armed groups. The recommendations concerning such contact must take national contexts into account when their viability is assessed on a case by case basis, taking fully into account the decisions of the democratically established authorities.

The Government of Colombia reiterates the commitment of its democratic institutions in consolidating the protection of the population against the actions of illegal armed groups. We reiterate our call on the international community to vigorously condemn the crimes committed by these violent groups against Colombians.

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