

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express the appreciation of the Egyptian delegation for your initiative, Mr. President, to convene this general debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

This debate takes place at a very perilous time. The Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip are confronting genocide under the very nose of the Security Council, and the Israeli occupying Power is clearly and flagrantly violating its obligations under international law and international humanitarian law. Moreover, its actions constitute a blatant defiance of the authority of the Security Council, which has made continuous calls — *inter alia*, in its press statement of 15 December and its resolution 1860 (2009), adopted on 8 January 2009 — for an immediate ceasefire between Palestinians and Israelis.

The recent Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip has demonstrated unequivocally the inability of the Security Council to enforce its decisions. It has also demonstrated the Council's inability to adopt critical decisions in a timely manner, as expected by the international community. Furthermore, the Council has demonstrated its inability to prevent the escalation of Israel's brutal air and ground military operations and its use of internationally banned weapons. The Council is also unable to impose the will of the United Nations as the sole representative of the international community, even when such representation takes the form of a unanimously adopted statement or a resolution adopted by 14 votes in favour and the abstention of one member that endorsed the main thrust of the text.

The issue, then, is that the Security Council discusses the protection of civilians in armed conflict, but turns a blind eye to the ongoing massacre, which has killed approximately 1,000 Palestinians and injured nearly 5,000, at the hands of a brutal force occupying their land. The Council procrastinates on any significant negotiations aimed at peace and claims, with support from forces within and outside its membership, that Israel is exercising its legitimate right to self-defence and reacting to the deaths of Israelis, who number no more than the fingers of one hand, from rockets launched from the Gaza Strip. Israel uses not only excessive and disproportionate force, but also internationally prohibited weapons, in its so-called self-defence, while flouting all its legal and ethical obligations.

Protecting civilians in armed conflict from death and injury and providing humanitarian and economic assistance to the brotherly Palestinian people were the main goals of the Egyptian initiative launched by President Mubarak on 8 January, in conjunction with the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009). The initiative calls first for an immediate ceasefire for a predetermined period, during which humanitarian assistance can be delivered. It provides for an appropriate timeframe for negotiations on the arrangements and guarantees stipulated by the resolution in order to make the temporary ceasefire permanent, thereafter promoting the resumption of peace negotiations.

However, both parties have so far chosen not to implement this initiative; each believes that it will emerge victorious from this military confrontation, ignoring the fact that there are no winners in such a war. There will be clear losers, however: the civilians of Palestine and Israel alike. Those civilians have lost their lives so that some might achieve their electoral aspirations or claim a bogus victory at the expense of the deceased victims. Victory cannot be achieved except through a genuine peace process based not on the ambitions and aspirations of individuals, but on the benefits of peoples living in peace and stability.

Egypt's efforts to establish an immediate ceasefire between both sides continue, but it also believes that the Security Council has a great responsibility to impose the international will represented in its resolutions and statements; adopt all the necessary measures to protect civilians on both sides by pushing forcefully to implement its decisions; enforce all human rights protection mechanisms, especially through the convening of a special session of the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva

Convention; implement the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 11 January; and provide international protection through a protection force for the Palestinian people, in implementation of the principle of the responsibility to protect. Some seek to apply that principle to specific countries, while bypassing others toiling under brutal occupation and confronting ferocious aggression without any international force to protect them.

Furthermore, the Security Council is primarily and the General Assembly secondarily responsible for investigating war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and for handing over those who are responsible for committing such crimes to international prosecutors. This should take place in conjunction with Arab and international efforts to end the occupation, since without an end to the occupation and without a right for the Palestinian people to establish their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, the Middle East will never enjoy stability and civilians in Palestine and Israel will not enjoy lives of peace and security.

In order to achieve those ends and to create an opportunity for the peace process to succeed, the siege imposed on the Palestinian people in Gaza must be lifted, access to basic humanitarian and economic needs must be ensured, and Palestinian national reconciliation should be achieved so that clear political prospects that will contribute to the success of regional and international efforts to stop the violence and ensure the success of the peace process, can be established. In this regard, Egypt will continue to do its utmost to achieve those two goals by supporting all efforts to restore full security and stability to the occupied Palestinian territories until the occupation has ended and the independent Palestinian State is established.