

Egypt - Statement to the Security Council, Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
9 November 2011

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the pleasure of addressing the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). I start by expressing the Movement's appreciation to the Portuguese presidency for organizing this debate and to President Cavaco Silva for presiding. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and the Director for International Law and Cooperation of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their statements to the Council today.

It is obvious from current world events that despite all efforts by the United Nations, including the Security Council, civilians are still suffering in massive numbers around the globe. The measures adopted so far fall short of addressing the wider implications of attacks against civilians and their impact on international peace and security, as well as their humanitarian impacts.

The last report of the Secretary-General (S/2010/579), submitted in November 2010 pursuant to resolution 1894 (2009), also highlights ongoing and emerging concerns regarding the state of protection of civilians. These include the proliferation and fragmentation of non-State armed groups, the displacement of civilians within and across borders, the continued violence and hardship that women and children face during armed conflict, and the continued existence of a culture of impunity.

In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement believes that due priority should continue to be given to the promotion of knowledge of, respect for and observance by States of their obligations assumed under the Charter of the United Nations, international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular those of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Protocols.

We call upon all parties to armed conflicts to redouble their efforts to comply with their legal obligations through, inter alia, prohibiting the targeting of civilian populations and civilian property and stressing their responsibility to ensure general protection against dangers arising from military operations to civilian installations, hospitals and relief materials and the means to transport and distribute such relief materials.

The Movement reiterates its condemnation of the increasing attacks on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and urges the Governments of States Members of the United Nations to ensure respect for the protection of the personnel of humanitarian organizations, in conformity with the relevant provisions of international law. In the meantime, we reaffirm that humanitarian assistance personnel should respect international humanitarian law and the laws of the countries where they operate, the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance set out in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, and non-interference in the cultural, religious and other values of the population in the countries where they operate.

Furthermore, the Non-Aligned Movement emphasizes that respect for the principles of the sovereign equality, political independence and territorial integrity of all States and of non-intervention must be upheld. Consent of the country is imperative for granting access to humanitarian assistance to its territory and for its continued operations at all times.

In a peacekeeping context, NAM stresses that protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence remains the primary responsibility of each country hosting any peacekeeping operation. It stresses further that peacekeeping missions with this mandate should conduct their tasks without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the host Government to protect civilians. Efforts of the United Nations come in support of and not in substitution for those of the national authorities. In this regard, NAM stresses that the successful conduct of tasks relating to the protection of civilians wherever a United Nations mandate exists requires the integration of efforts at all levels and a holistic approach that encompasses the provision of timely and adequate resources, logistical support and the required training, as well as clearly defined and achievable mandates. The principle of the consent of the host State as a founding principle of peacekeeping must also be fully respected.

The development of strategies for the protection of civilians in peacekeeping missions where it is mandated is significant. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations should continue to discuss the best ways to overcome the challenges that remain. These challenges include the operationalization of such strategies in action on the ground, the gap in resources needed to carry out this complex mandate task, and the legal aspects of categorizing civilians in combat situations in accordance with international law.

Let me conclude by reiterating the firm belief of the Non-Aligned Movement in the importance of the protection of civilians in conflict situations, establishing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and putting an end to impunity.