

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

Mr. Serrano (European Union):

Many thanks, Madam President, for giving the floor to the European Union (EU), allowing it to contribute to this timely and important debate. The candidate countries of Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, and the European Free Trade Association country of Iceland, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan, align themselves with this statement.

In the interest of time, I shall read out an abridged version of the EU statement. Let me thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his presentation on the current challenges relating to the protection of civilians. I also welcome the participation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Pillay, in this debate, and thank her for the proposals aimed at strengthening human rights protection for civilians in the most difficult situations.

Thanks to the work conducted within the United Nations, there is an increasing understanding of the important concept of the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict. As it is a cross-cutting issue, our strategy needs to be comprehensive. It should encompass activities that range from ensuring the safety and physical integrity of civilian populations to preventing war crimes and other deliberate acts of violence, securing humanitarian access and ensuring full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to conflict.

The adoption of resolution 1894 (2009), last November, is a landmark development. It reflects the increased attention paid by the Security Council to protection issues. Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security and on children and armed conflict also contribute to enhancing the protection agenda. Furthermore, stronger interaction between the Council, troop and police contributors, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, missions and other relevant actors in the field adds to greater coherence and helps mainstream the issue of protection. The European Union commends the work of the expert group on the protection of civilians as a valuable forum for addressing protection concerns in the run-up to mandate renewals.

Moreover, it is crucial to highlight the importance of developing synergies between the protection of civilians and other fields such as transitional justice, gender policies and development, and of ensuring good cooperation among all actors concerned. In the same vein, enhanced cooperation between the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) will allow the sharing of experience and

expertise with regard to protection issues, especially relating to the four countries currently on the PBC agenda, as the EU has repeatedly underlined in the consultations for the 2010 review of the PBC. In particular, the return, resettlement and protection of internally displaced persons and refugees and the specific protection needs of women and children need to be addressed in still volatile post-conflict environments. The PBC has been indeed active in this field.

We are grateful to Under-Secretary-General Holmes for underlining the need for better compliance with international humanitarian law, including by non-State actors, and we concur with the need for greater accountability for violations of international humanitarian law.

The European Union encourages the Council to adopt appropriate measures in cases of widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in situations of armed conflict. In this regard, we welcome the recently adopted presidential statement on children and armed conflict (S/PRST/2010/10), which provides for increased exchange between the Security Council Working Group on children and armed conflict and sanctions committees.

Moreover, as Under-Secretary-General Holmes underlined in his briefing today, it is essential to ensure safe access to the civilian population — particularly to vulnerable groups, such as detainees, IDPs, women and children — for humanitarian assistance. We look forward to more comprehensive reporting by the Secretary-General on challenges to humanitarian access in situations on the agenda of the Council.

As the world's largest provider of humanitarian aid and through its contributions to crisis management, the European Union is an important partner in United Nations engagements in conflict and post-conflict situations. Over the course of the past year alone, the United Nations and the European Union have worked together in more than 60 countries that were either in emergency or protracted crises to provide assistance and offer protection to vulnerable groups.

While the protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect are two different concepts that must not be confused with one another, there is a clear linkage between them because, when populations are properly protected, they will not fall victim to genocide, war crimes, crime against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

As many speakers have stressed today, the implementation and operationalization of the protection mandates of United Nations peacekeeping and other missions are key to protecting civilians. The European Union recognizes and welcomes important implementation steps taken since the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009). These include the independent study commissioned by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the operational concept and the lessons learned note circulated by DPKO; and the regular inclusion of protection of civilians tasks in the mandates of United Nations

peacekeeping operations; the more consistent and systemic consideration of protection of civilians issues in the Secretary-General's reports; the significant inclusion of several paragraphs on the protection of civilians in the 2010 recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (see A/64/19), including the development of a strategic framework for mission-wide protection strategies; the elaboration of protection of civilians training modules; and an assessment of the resource requirements for implementing protection mandates. We look forward to the next report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians and to the first progress report on New Horizons, and trust that the issue of improving the protection of civilians will be addressed therein. All these measures will contribute to the development of a culture of protection.

The European Union, for its part, is currently studying the United Nations implementation tools closely, not least in view of our own efforts to further develop the guidelines on the protection of civilians in European Union crisis-management missions and operations. We are very eager to exchange experiences with the United Nations on this issue. In our view, cooperation in this field could be extended to other international actors engaged in crisis management, such as NATO, the African Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the International Committee of the Red Cross, civil society groups and others.

I would like to close by thanking Under- Secretary-General Holmes for his excellent and tireless work for the United Nations humanitarian cause, and wish him all the best for his future.

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