

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of all five Nordic countries: Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

The Nordic countries welcome this six-monthly open debate and wish to thank the presidency of the Security Council and the Secretary-General for organizing it, as well as Under-Secretary-General John Holmes for his topical briefing. Timely briefings to the Security Council by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and other relevant actors will help the Council to act sufficiently early on in conflict situations to effectively protect civilians at risk.

The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. Regrettably, and in spite of the established status of the fundamental rule of distinction — identified by the International Court of Justice as an intransgressible principle of international customary law — civilians often fall victim to the disregard of States and armed groups of their obligations. Even State signatories to the relevant instruments fail to abide by the relevant provisions. The Nordic countries wish to emphasize that unarmed men, women and children must not be targeted. All necessary measures must be taken by parties to a conflict to avoid civilian casualties.

The Nordic countries are deeply concerned by the escalation of violence in Gaza and the killing and injuries inflicted upon large numbers of non-combatants. The ceasefire called for by the Security Council must be given effect. Life-saving ambulances must be given unrestricted access to the wounded; medical personnel, hospitals and other medical units must be respected and protected. It is also worth recalling that disrespect of the rules by one party to a conflict can never serve as a justification for the deliberate targeting of civilians or civilian objects.

It is essential to strengthen local capacities to protect civilians at risk of grave human rights violations. Through the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support, the Nordic countries have offered training support for peace support operations to partners, inter alia, in the western Balkans and Ukraine. Our additional focus is now on Africa, where we are examining potential Nordic projects to support the development of the African peace and security architecture.

In order to build sustainable peace and security, there is a need for increased attention to women's equal and active participation in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, reconstruction and political participation. As women and children are vulnerable in conflicts, their situation should be addressed accordingly. The comprehensive implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) is crucial. The Nordic countries are committed to doing their share in the implementation process. A

concrete case in point is that all five Nordic countries have drawn up national action plans on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

The scope and brutality of sexual violence against women in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo are particularly worrying. Hundreds of thousands of women in the region have been raped, and they continue to lack protection from further sexual violence, despite the efforts of humanitarian actors, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and others. Much more needs to be done in order to address these horrible crimes. In this context, it is crucial to implement resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in armed conflict.

We recognize the need to enhance the complementarity and coordination of national policies and strategies related to security, development, human rights and humanitarian issues. International humanitarian law grants children special protection and sets a minimum age for participating in hostilities. The short-, medium- and long-term impacts of armed conflict on children, adolescents and young persons must be addressed in an effective, sustainable and comprehensive manner. The Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that children have the right to express their opinion in matters that affect them. We have to expand opportunities for children's voices to be heard and given due weight in peace building and reconciliation efforts. More attention needs to be paid to this aspect of the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict. The Nordic countries wish to emphasize the need to mainstream the rights of the child into all activities in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The engagement of the Security Council has greatly elevated the relevance of child protection concerns within its international peace and security agenda and has allowed for opportunities to improve efforts and actions for the protection of children. While there has been progress in some field, there is an urgent need to address all grave violations; in particular, sexual violence against children is a heinous consequence of war. We wish to join the call by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for strong action also to be taken against those who sexually violate children.

On a more positive note, the Nordic countries recall the establishment of the International Criminal

Court as an achievement of historical significance. Now that the Statute is in force for 108 States and the system laid down for it is fully operational and functioning, there is much reason to be confident in the Court's future. The ideas of justice and accountability have been institutionally anchored at the international level and more broadly embraced than ever before. The first proceedings of the International Criminal Court highlight the duty to protect civilians in armed conflicts. The

Nordic countries urge all States to ratify the Rome Statute and to fully implement its provisions in their national legislation.

We are also encouraged by the unequivocal statement issued at the 2005 World Summit on the responsibility to protect civilian populations from genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and war crimes. We look forward to the report of the Secretary-General on this notion and believe that it will provide a basis for further deepening the international consensus on the necessary steps to be taken by both States and international organizations to prevent humanitarian catastrophes.

Let me conclude by affirming that the Nordic countries will continue to be firmly committed with respect to this issue of great importance.