

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

Mr. Moungara Moussotsi (Gabon) (*spoke in French*):

I would first like to thank your delegation, Madam President, for your initiative to convene this debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary General, Mr. John Holmes and Ms. Pillay for their dynamic leadership on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The topic that brings us together today lies at the very heart of the Organization's mission, namely, to promote peace, security, the well-being of civilian populations and respect for human rights. However, we must note that, despite the strengthening of the legal regime in the area of the protection of civilians, including resolution 1894 (2009), the number of civilian victims of violence in armed conflict remains, unfortunately, too high.

In approaching today's debate, we must keep in mind the suffering and deep distress experienced by millions of people, in particular women, children, the disabled and the elderly, whose lives are brutally plunged into horror on a daily basis. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Mission has compiled figures proving the recruitment of 848 children in 2009. In Somalia, 110,000 people were displaced during the first quarter of 2010. Finally, in Afghanistan, over 2,150 communities are directly affected, with an average of 42 persons killed or injured by landmines and explosive devices every month.

Ensuring the protection of civilians in armed conflict remains a complex and multidimensional endeavour. It involves all aspects of the Security Council's work in the areas of maintaining international peace and security, humanitarian affairs, the rule of law and matters pertaining to international criminal law. I welcome the fact that today's debate is taking place directly after the Security Council examined consecutively, under Mexico's presidency, the issues of international criminal tribunals and of strengthening the rule of law in the maintenance of international peace and security.

My delegation would like to address two essential aspects related to our debate, namely, strengthening the mandates of peacekeeping operations and the responsibility of the perpetrators of violence.

Concerning the first point, my delegation remains convinced that the protection of civilians in armed conflict falls primarily to States themselves. The Council therefore cannot consider an effective response to this scourge without the full cooperation of the relevant State.

Gabon would like to commend the progress achieved in the past few years by the Council, in particular with regard to incorporating into the mandates of

peacekeeping operations the urgent need to protect civilian victims of armed conflict. Recently adopted resolutions — including resolution 1933 (2010) on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, resolution 1925 (2010) on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and resolution 1919 (2010) on the United Nations Mission in the Sudan — illustrate this well. Indeed, the mandates of these peacekeeping operations are unique in that they adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach based on realities on the ground and are adapted to the crucial security needs of the populations concerned.

Such an approach enables us to better guarantee the security of displaced persons and refugees, to prevent sexual violence and to better protect children. The success of such an approach presupposes that peacekeeping operations have the necessary operational, technical, financial and human resources. Furthermore, it would be wise to improve the information exchange mechanisms between the various parties to, and stakeholders in, conflicts.

In that connection, my country welcomes the measures advocated by the Secretariat in the elaboration of the so-called New Horizon Initiative. In that regard, special focus should be placed on the need to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations.

In addition, the recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations aimed at forging a genuine partnership to improve the planning, deployment and management of peacekeeping operations, inter alia in Africa, must remain at the very forefront of our concerns.

With respect to the second point, my delegation notes that the strengthening of peacekeeping operations will bear full fruit only if the Security Council continues to devote all the necessary attention to the issue of the criminal liability of the perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, crimes of genocide and all serious violence against civilian populations.

I am compelled to stress the need to pursue awareness-raising work on this issue with non-State armed groups, which too often undertake actions beyond the pale of the law and believe that they can escape justice. This issue is closely related to our previous debate on the Security Council's action to end impunity. This allows us better to understand the link between the protection of civilians and the need for a strong State capable of upholding all the attributes of sovereignty. Our previous debates have also underscored the link between the need for justice and peacebuilding. This is the right place and time to recall the critical role played by national tribunals, ad hoc tribunals and the International Criminal Court in the fight against impunity.

In conclusion, I pay a personal tribute to United Nations personnel and all humanitarian organizations for their dedication to the worthy cause of the victims of armed conflict. Their activities in very difficult and dangerous circumstances have

averted terrible humanitarian disasters and assisted those in distress. I hope it can be agreed that a more effective fight against violence against civilians in armed conflict requires vigorous and concerted global action to prevent conflicts.

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