

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

Mr. Wittig (Germany):

Germany fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Let me at the outset thank Under-Secretary-General John Holmes for his statement and for his work at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and wish him all the best for the future. Let me also extend a very warm welcome to Ms. Pillay. The voice of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is particularly relevant in this debate.

We are pleased that the past few months have seen relevant progress on protection issues in the United Nations. Like many other speakers, we consider the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009) last November to be a landmark decision, requesting the Secretary-General to develop an operational concept for the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We are looking forward to the report of the Secretary-General in November this year.

The independent study by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and OCHA published in January has also provided a valuable analysis of the successes, setbacks and remaining challenges concerning the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. It also makes a number of concrete proposals to remedy existing shortcomings. We also welcome the recommendations that the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations has provided with this year's report (A/64/19). Clear and achievable mandates for peacekeeping operations remain key, providing the missions with the needed resources and with the strategic framework to guide senior mission leadership in elaborating a comprehensive protection strategy.

We recognize the important work the Security Council has done to enhance the protection agenda on such issues as women, peace and security and children and armed conflict. Only last month, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on children and armed conflict (S/PRST/2010/10), which called for an increased exchange of information between the Security Council Working Group on children and armed conflict and relevant sanction committees of the Security Council. The Security Council also expressed its willingness to adopt targeted measures against persistent perpetrators. We believe that this is a step in the right direction.

Despite the positive developments I mentioned, challenges remain. In our intervention on the protection of civilians last November (see S/PV.6216), we highlighted a number of challenges related to United Nations peacekeeping operations. We argued for enhanced mandating, better doctrine and preparation, improved planning and preparedness, and a comprehensive approach throughout peacekeeping missions.

All these issues remain valid today. They should, however, not obstruct our view of the specific requirements of the protection of civilians at the mission level. Special representatives and force commanders are responsible for implementing the protection agenda in the field. The international community, humanitarian actors and, above all, affected populations have legitimate expectations that protection mandates will be implemented on the ground. It is important that missions make use of all their military, civilian and, above all, political resources to fulfil this important task, in accordance with respective Security Council mandates. In this, they require and deserve the full support of the Security Council and the international community as a whole. The issue of the implementation of protection of civilians measures at the mission level was thoroughly discussed in the debate about the extension of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo/Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and should be addressed by the Security Council when deciding about the renewal of the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur in a few weeks' time.

To conclude, let me briefly stress the corrosive effect impunity has on respect for international law. Ensuring compliance and accountability is key to enhancing respect for applicable international law. States must not fail in their responsibility to thoroughly investigate and prosecute persons suspected of war crimes, crimes against humanity or other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

The protection of civilians is an important crosscutting issue which is of particular relevance to my country, given the contributions Germany makes to United Nations peacekeeping operations. We will actively participate in future debates on this issue.

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