

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate and the Emergency Relief Coordinator for his briefing at the beginning of this meeting.

This debate is taking place against the backdrop of the armed conflict in Gaza, which is causing very high numbers of civilian casualties, in particular among children. We support resolution 1860 (2009), which is legally binding on the parties to the conflict, and call for its implementation, first and foremost in the interest of the civilian population, whose rights are not being respected, who are bearing the brunt of the ongoing violence and who are being deprived of the necessary humanitarian assistance. The parties to the conflict have the responsibility under international humanitarian law to facilitate humanitarian operations.

Civilian populations have always suffered the consequences of armed conflicts, but modern warfare and the changed nature of armed conflict have massively exacerbated their situation. The Security

Council has routinely discussed the plight of civilians in conflict situations and achieved some remarkable results. Most recently, resolutions 1674 (2006) and 1738 (2006) constituted important steps in enhancing the normative and operational framework for the protection of civilians.

Nevertheless, the disproportionate burden that armed conflicts continue to place on civilians requires more consistent and more permanent engagement. The establishment of an expert-level group of the Council and the consistent application and updating of the aide-memoire with a view to the consideration of issues pertaining to the protection of civilians would facilitate more systematic consideration of protection issues.

A positive development outside the Council was the adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which we have signed, together with nearly 100 other States. While that was only a first step, we hope that it will rapidly lead to the total elimination of such weapons, which are by nature indiscriminate and causing enormous suffering among civilian populations around the globe.

This year, we are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, one of the outstanding achievements in the history of international law and the centrepiece of international humanitarian law. Only the full implementation of the Geneva Conventions and of other provisions of international humanitarian law can ensure the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict. Sadly, in the recent past, we have witnessed an erosion in the observance of international humanitarian law, and we must urgently reverse that trend.

We are also supportive of the principle of the responsibility to protect, endorsed at the summit level more than three years ago, and call for its consistent application both at the international level and by the relevant intergovernmental bodies.

If the observance of the relevant standards of international law is at the core of the protection agenda, the effective fight against impunity is its necessary complement.

When national judiciaries fail in their duty to prosecute the most serious crimes under international law, the International Criminal Court can step in to fill the gap. While more than 100 States have become parties to the Rome Statute, the Security Council also has a special obligation by virtue of the referral powers given to it under the Statute.

One type of crime warrants the particular attention of the Council. Owing to its large-scale, systematic and targeted use, sexual violence is no longer simply a by-product of armed conflict; it has become a method of warfare aimed at destroying the social fabric of communities in order to achieve political and military ends. In that regard, we reaffirm our support for resolution 1820 (2008). The protection of civilians from acts of sexual violence must be a task inherent to all peacekeeping missions, and the Council's mandates must offer clear guidance on how to provide such protection. Furthermore, the full implementation of resolution 1820 (2008) requires more resources for the collection of data on sexual violence in conflict situations.