

**Ms. Graham** (New Zealand): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for calling this open debate. We welcome the latest revised aide-memoire on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his compelling briefing earlier today. The plight of civilians caught in current conflicts underscores the importance and immediacy of this subject for the Council and the international community. As the issue of the protection of civilians is wide-ranging, in the interests of time I will focus my comments on areas of importance to New Zealand.

First and foremost, as the aide-memoire affirms, it is the responsibility of parties to armed conflict to ensure the protection of civilians in conflict areas. It is a distressing reality that steps necessary to protect civilian populations are not being taken by parties to conflicts. Even more deplorable is the fact that civilians are not simply being caught in the crossfire but that, in many cases, are actually the targets of attacks.

New Zealand continues to be appalled at human rights violations and abuses directed against civilian populations. The crises in Darfur, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe are of particular concern, with human rights abuses occurring widely and often with apparent impunity. In many cases, targeted attacks against civilian populations, sexual violence, the recruitment of child soldiers, summary executions and the forced removal of civilian populations are causing extreme humanitarian distress. New Zealand stands with the international community in expressing its deep concern at those situations. We fully support United Nations peacekeeping and other relevant missions and actors in their efforts to protect civilians in zones of armed conflict in Africa.

The ongoing crisis in Gaza throws into sharp relief the plight of civilian populations caught in fighting by protagonists who show little regard for their safety. The indiscriminate firing of rockets into towns and the full-scale military campaigns being conducted in heavily populated cities inevitably mean that the civilian population pays the heaviest price. The protection of civilians begins with the need for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, as called for by the Council in resolution 1860 (2009). Full access must be allowed to relief agencies to assist the people of Gaza, who have borne the brunt of the suffering. Those are practical and immediately possible actions that simply require political will on the part of both protagonists.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains of concern, with ongoing insurgent attacks against the Government of Afghanistan and the forces of NATO and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). NATO and ISAF have stated clearly the importance of avoiding civilian casualties to the maximum extent possible. New Zealand is playing an active role in the protection of civilians through its Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamyán province. The Team provides daily security to the people of Bamyán and facilitates development assistance programmes.

New Zealand is also deeply concerned at the increasing trend of attacks deliberately targeted at humanitarian workers in conflict zones. Many of those attacks involve humanitarian workers in United Nations-mandated assistance missions. We must do more to ensure the safety and security of those unarmed civilian workers. New Zealand urges

all parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law, and recalls in particular the duty to respect and protect humanitarian assistance personnel. We welcome the inclusion in the aide-memoire of the section on humanitarian access and the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

Finally, New Zealand is proud to be among the first countries to have signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The Convention places at its centre the people who are most affected by cluster munitions — the victims and communities trying to rebuild after armed conflict has disrupted their lives.

In conclusion, New Zealand strongly supports practical and concrete action to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We urge the Council to keep those issues at the forefront of its work.