

**Nigeria -- Statement to the Security Council, Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
9 November 2011**

Mr. Onemola (Nigeria): Let me join others in welcoming President Silva to the Council and thanking him for his statement. The Nigerian delegation is grateful to Portugal for bringing us together to address an important and integral component of our common efforts to maintain international peace and security. Increasingly, the effectiveness of the United Nations, and of the Security Council in particular, is measured against its ability to protect civilians. We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay, Assistant-Secretary-General Catherine Bragg and Mr. Philip Spoerri of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their insightful statements, which have broadened our understanding of the achievements and the continued challenges we face in our collective efforts to protect civilians.

In the last 10 months, the ability of the Council to adequately protect civilians in conflict situations has been severely tested over and over again. The Council's scorecard shows mixed results. Through carefully calibrated interventions in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya, full-scale civil wars have been averted, relative stability restored and many lives saved. However, for civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza, Syria and Western Sahara — to name but a few situations — whose lives have been overturned by conflict, our response has been small.

In such circumstances, we welcome the invaluable preventive diplomacy efforts of actors such as the Department of Political Affairs, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and other interlocutors, who have unquestionably provided alternative routes to conflict resolution. Our valiant peacekeepers, who act as beacons for peace, have also played an important role in civilian protection. Those remarkable efforts in the field can be buttressed by a renewed commitment on the part of the Security Council to ensuring accountability for violations of humanitarian law.

We focus on the accountability issue because we in Nigeria have witnessed at first hand what can be lost when wrongs go undetected and unpunished. Nothing spreads fear like impunity. Where there is an accountability mechanism gap, there can be no recourse for the father whose crop has been razed to the ground, for the grandmother whose compound has been destroyed, or for the child whose school has been occupied by rebel forces. Worse still, where there is impunity the physical integrity of civilians is no longer inviolable. The lesson we draw from such situations is that systematic monitoring of and reporting on the situation of conflict-affected civilians, in accordance with resolution 1894 (2009), is still necessary in numerous conflict and post-conflict situations on the Council's agenda.

In the last open debate on this subject, in May of this year (see S/PV.6531), we observed that unless a coordinated, comprehensive approach, implemented system-wide, is adopted, our understanding of threats to civilians will remain unclear, and civilians will continue to suffer. Resolution 1998 (2011) on children and armed conflict presents an

opportunity for us to make good on our pledge to develop and apply listing criteria that target parties to armed conflicts who violate international law. Monitoring in that way will not only help all stakeholders to understand the dangers that civilians face, such as the use of explosives and heavy weaponry in populated areas, and sexual violence as a weapon of war; it will also help us better target our investigative resources.

We can also assist national authorities in the area of accountability. Through security sector reform efforts in Guinea, the Government is progressively creating a security environment in which disciplinary measures and human rights standards are upheld. Our role in such contexts is to empower Governments to take the lead in demonstrating genuine accountability to civilians. Not only do these acts have a deterrent effect on other potential wrongdoers, thereby protecting civilians, they can also restore a nation's faith in its leadership. Effective accountability mechanisms can create space for examining the root causes of conflict, leading to long-term solutions. The role of the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry on Libya should not be understated. The Commission's work was central to decisions taken here in the Council, leading ultimately to the emergence of a new, free Libya.

Even so, our credibility depends on our commitment to applying the principles of accountability consistently and with all due vigilance. No argument in favour of standing by while civilians are attacked can be sustained. Indeed, we are facing numerous delicate situations where levels of violence risk tipping into civil war, and we are duty-bound to speak out. We must recognize that material challenges remain in Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile, as well as in Syria. We take this opportunity to encourage the Government of Syria to abide by the peace plan proposed by the Arab League. Once swords are sheathed, genuine dialogue for peace can begin.

In championing the protection of civilians, we deliver a message of hope and a signal of the strength of our collective will. It is within our capabilities to shield the vulnerable from the ravages of conflict and other breaches of peace and security. If we continue to act in concert, over time, our responsibility to protect will surely be met.