

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

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan):

Please accept my felicitations, Madam President, on your assumption of your very important office and for your able stewardship in convening this very important debate.

We have carefully listened to the briefings of the Secretary-General and Mr. John Holmes, the Under-Secretary-General heading the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We bid him a fond farewell and commend the very good work he has done in his tenure. It is a thankless job. Of course, we wish him the very best in his next appointment. I also wish to thank Ms. Navanethem Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights.

At the outset, let me state unequivocally that the Government of Pakistan condemns attacks on civilians under all circumstances. It is indeed an abominable act that cannot be justified under any circumstances. That was rightfully reflected in Mr. John Holmes' submissions.

Pakistan is very proud of being one of the largest troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping missions and is fully engaged in this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. However, there have been some references made that are perhaps somewhat out of context and might have been better viewed in perspective, as I shall explain in a while.

As we debate the subject of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, we understand, or should understand, that this is not a debate on the protection of civilians in all situations. There are some strict applications and criteria. Perhaps we should have heard more mention of parts of the world where innocent people continue to suffer because of their inability to exercise their right to self-determination and the lack of judicial succour. Maybe the mention of the attack on the humanitarian flotilla in international waters off the coast of Gaza, which was an act of wilful intent, and the continuing violations in Palestine could have been portrayed a little better. But as far as we are concerned, we have the very difficult task of eliminating the scourge of international terrorism from our territories and of protecting not only ourselves but the world.

I think that the two comments made about Pakistan — one on the aspect of thousands of civilian conflict dead, where we are bunched together with Gaza, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and Somalia; and the other on the 1.8 million displaced people in Pakistan, although it has been stated quite clearly that many have since returned — need a little more explanation.

First, the world is calling upon us all the time to take on international terrorism in the boundary regions so widely mentioned in the document before me. We have to go along with the international community. But I think that document rightly says that, whereas in Swat and in South Waziristan there were at one stage nearly 1.8 million people displaced, they were not in fact displaced. They were asked to leave the areas before our militaries moved in with complete international backing to rid the areas of the miscreants creating world terror. The fact is that they went out voluntarily and that OCHA did a really good job in looking after them, as did many other institutions and the Government of Pakistan. Less than a few hundred thousand were actually in camps set up by OCHA; the others were in fact looked after by our own people and the Government. The fact that they went back at such a fast rate is perhaps a reflection of the fact that they were kept out of harm's way. They could have suffered awfully, but we brought them out despite the fact that our doing so perhaps gave a lot of leeway for the terrorists to slip away. But we took that option because it was the right one. We had to protect our people. By the grace of God, we have been able to see a lot of them back in the various parts from which they came.

In my mind, that is vindication that we have tried our level best and succeeded in keeping civilians out of harm's way. Pakistan is a functioning democracy with a very strong, rejuvenated judiciary that is pursuing *suo moto* any contradiction of humanitarian acts or matters in a very activist manner. That is being done at the highest possible forums, even up to the supreme judiciary level. We are determined to achieve the protection and promotion of the human rights of all our citizens. That objective has the fullest support not only of our people, but also of the international community.

We are very concerned about attacks on humanitarian actors, and we are committed and continue to provide all possible protection and security to humanitarian actors working in Pakistan. We have often succeeded in retrieving those who were kidnapped. Many hundreds of our own security personnel have given their lives to protect humanitarian actors. I cannot underscore that more strongly than I am doing now.

Let us not underestimate our constraints, of which the Council is aware, or let our will and sacrifice be undermined by being included in dissimilar country groupings. We have our own particular situation. Obviously, we ask for the Council's indulgence and understanding. But believe me, as far as we are concerned, we will do anything to protect our civilians, and yet relentlessly pursue all those who try to make the world an unsafe place.

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