

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): The State of Qatar attaches great importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I therefore thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to participate in this important debate today. I would also like to thank Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary- General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his important briefing.

The Security Council has clear responsibilities in the area of protecting civilians in armed conflict, including situations of foreign occupation, which are governed by the rules of international law. International humanitarian law, and international human rights law in particular, prohibit killing civilians and exposing them to harm. They also prohibit reprisals against civilians and civilian targets, including health and educational institutions, and the deliberate destruction of homes. These laws confirm that the wilful commission of such prohibited acts constitutes a war crime.

Despite the principles and provisions that represent legal safeguards for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, such conflicts are still claiming the lives of innocent civilians, whose fundamental rights and freedoms are being violated. The problem, therefore, lies in the non-implementation of international legal instruments and in the use of double standards in addressing various situations in which the international community has failed to enforce international laws and resolutions and to hold the perpetrators accountable before such laws. This in turn emboldens the perpetrators and gives them *carte blanche* to commit such acts.

Conversely, when the international community has been determined to enforce the laws necessary for the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict and to achieve that through existing mechanisms, it has succeeded on many occasions in fighting impunity, ensuring the protection of civilians and strengthening their human rights.

Today, the war on the Gaza Strip enters its nineteenth day. Palestinian civilians in Gaza are subject on a daily basis to relentless military attacks by Israel, the occupying Power. Such attacks do not discriminate between women, children, the elderly or people with disabilities.

In a speech delivered on 4 January 2009, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar, called on the international community to undertake efforts for the protection and relief of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. His Highness highlighted that the Israeli war machine targets everybody and does not discriminate among its victims. He also said that a war waged with such force against civilian targets cannot but constitute a war crime, as it clearly violates international humanitarian law and international human rights laws, including the Geneva Conventions, and in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, which includes provisions on the protection of civilians under foreign occupation. The number of Palestinian civilian killed in Gaza Strip has almost reached 1,000. What are we going to do about it?

United Nations reports, including reports by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF, highlight the dire situation in which Palestinian children and their families are still living. Entire families have been killed and buried

alive under the rubble of their homes. Those who have managed to survive suffer psychological trauma that will haunt them for the rest of their lives. Others have suffered serious injuries and have become mentally and physically disabled.

The Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip is subjected to a campaign of collective punishment, as stated by Mr. Richard Falk, the Special

Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. The infrastructure in Gaza, including hospitals and schools, is also under constant attack. The continuous targeting of such institutions leaves no safe areas for the civilian Palestinian population to shelter.

This situation prompted Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, Consort of His Highness the Emir of Qatar, in her capacity as UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, to address a letter to the Secretary-General on 5 January, calling upon the Security Council and the international community to ensure the necessary protection for educational institutions in Gaza with a view to providing a safe haven for the children of Gaza and their families, allowing access to humanitarian assistance and basic materials and evacuating the sick and the wounded.

The world has witnessed how Israel targeted the Al-Fakhura School run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The school provided protection for the children of Gaza and their families, who took refuge in the premises, believing they were in a safe haven. Forty- five people were killed and another 130 were wounded.

We reiterate our call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities, meet its obligations to protect civilians in armed conflict and ensure respect for the instruments of international law and Security Council resolutions, which provide the legal basis for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including in situations of foreign occupation. The rule of law constitutes a fundamental issue in armed conflict. It is therefore imperative for us to realize that respect for international law constitutes the true basis for a world free of armed conflict.

The Security Council today, faced with the indiscriminate aggression against the Gaza Strip, must shoulder its responsibilities towards the Palestinian civilian victims, especially the Palestinian women and children who have been maimed, burned and buried under the rubble by the Israeli war machine, which has spared no one. We would like to remind the Security Council that it is fully responsible for its failure to enforce its most recent resolution, among several others that provide for the protection to which the afflicted Palestinian people are entitled, and to stop the massacre being committed against them.