

**Mr. Mohamad** (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and express our great appreciation to you for having devoted today's discussion to the theme of protection of civilians in armed conflict. Ten years have passed since the submission to the Council of the first report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957), and two years have passed since the adoption of resolution 1674 (2006); we would like to commend Mr. Holmes for his statement on this subject. We hope that today's debate will lead to an objective vision on ways and means to protect civilians and, above all, to eliminate the causes of conflict, because, as they say, it is better to prevent than to treat.

We note with concern that civilians are not only victims of violence, flight and displacement, but are also victims of the latest technologies of death, including cluster bombs and phosphorus bombs, which

has shocked the international community. This is particularly true in Gaza, where children, the elderly and women, and even fruit trees, are victims of death and destruction. The aggression against civilians in Gaza leads us to raise questions in the Council about the credibility of debates on the protection of civilians, and about the crocodile tears and double standards that we see.

In a number of reports, the Secretary-General has emphasized the importance of activating and enhancing the civilian protection capacity of United Nations peacekeeping missions. At the same time, experience and practice have shown that when there is no peace to be kept on the ground, peacekeeping operations, whatever their protection capacity, are restricted to looking out for their own protection, because what protects civilians, above all, is peace, which is something that everyone needs, as are disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, and quick-impact development projects that can guarantee progress and ensure that civilians are able to leave displacement camps and return to their towns and villages, so that they can resume their normal lives.

For this, peace building needs to be a priority for the United Nations so that the Organization is not bogged down in dealing with the symptoms of conflict. We would also underscore that regional organizations have shown an increased capacity in this area because they understand the nature of conflicts and their causes and can thus add value. Here, we need to mention the decisions of the West Africa Conference on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict held by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Dakar in April 2007, which addressed the role of regional organizations in protecting civilians, beyond their peacekeeping role.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict is a noble goal and a major priority. But we are concerned about attempts to use this principle for political purposes, including the broad debate on what is being called the responsibility to protect. We stress that the principle of the responsibility to protect, despite the fact that it was incorporated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (General Assembly resolution 60/1), is still the subject of differing interpretations by Member States, taking into account the Charter principles

concerning State sovereignty and the full and unlimited responsibility of States with respect to the protection of their citizens.

We also recall that the duty to protect civilians in armed conflict is also one element in a comprehensive and interdependent set of rights and responsibilities set out in the 2005 Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2). Key among these are the right to development, the prevention of conflicts, the eradication of the root causes of conflict, the fight against poverty, the right of refugees to return, and the meeting by donors of their commitments in the area of development.

That is why the protection of civilians needs to be part of a comprehensive approach based essentially on addressing the causes of conflict through an active United Nations role in support of initiatives towards political settlements and reconciliation, complemented by a parallel role for the Organization and its agencies in the humanitarian area and the spheres of sustainable economic development and reconstruction.

The protection of civilians is ultimately the responsibility of States, which is why we need to enhance the capacities of the States involved so that they can properly shoulder their responsibilities. We must not weaken the capacities of these States through sanctions or adventurist actions aimed at undermining peace and through other kinds of interference in their internal affairs.

The manner in which the United Nations addresses the disaster facing civilians in Gaza should provide an example of the expected role of the United Nations in the area of the protection of civilians.

We need to hear from those who talk at length of the need to fight impunity and genocide. We want to hear them speak of the events in Gaza.