

Statement Of Sierra Leone: Ninth Open Debate On the Protection Of Civilians In  
Armed Conflict: 7 July 2010

**Mr. Kamara** (Sierra Leone):

My delegation wishes to pay special tribute to you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate of the Security Council to discuss the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Under-Secretary-General John Holmes and High Commissioner Pillay for their perceptive remarks.

Sierra Leone welcomes this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which has become one of the most valuable and indispensable tools available to the Security Council in addressing conflict challenges. The significance of this discussion cannot be overemphasized, but it is particularly important given that Africa is still home to a number of conflicts, making the challenges so real.

I would like to explicitly stress the nexus between the protection of civilians and transitional justice, especially when occasioned by default in the context of armed conflict, as the nature of war keeps changing, with conflicts increasingly interrelated, involving non-State actors and including the deliberate targeting of civilians.

It is important from the outset to recognize the significant strides made by the United Nations in addressing the immense challenges confronting the protection of civilians and the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009) of 11 November 2009 following a comprehensive review. Broadly speaking, those challenges include measures that can be taken to protect the safety, dignity, integrity and sanctity of all civilians in times of war, which are rooted in obligations under international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law. International humanitarian law lays down the minimum protection and standards applicable in a situation where people are most vulnerable in armed conflict. It aims to prevent situations that might exacerbate vulnerabilities, such as displacement and the destruction of civilian property.

On the specific question of mandates, I would like to preface our intervention by comprehensively looking at the situation in my country immediately following the United Nations troop hostage crisis in the eastern part of Sierra Leone. The initial mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone was changed in 2000 to include, among other functions, assisting in monitoring respect for international humanitarian law, including at disarmament and demobilization sites, emergency relief and the repatriation of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Security and geopolitical situation during that period in Sierra Leone posed a very serious challenge to the concept of the protection of civilians. The atrocities

committed by the warring factions accelerated the deployment of one of the largest peacekeeping forces in the history of the United Nations. That was necessary to protect civilians, who were left at the mercy of the rebels and their cohorts.

The new mandate also included the provision of security in and around disarmament and demobilization areas and facilitating the free flow of people, goods and humanitarian assistance. Although the mandate succinctly talked about the protection of civilians under imminent threat of danger, it did not specify how it should be done. Therefore, a mandate has to be very clear so as to leave no ambiguity. Today, most peacekeeping operations have the protection of civilians entrenched in the mandates given by the Security Council.

In his last report (S/2009/277), the Secretary- General urged compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as international and domestic criminal law, by States and non-State actors alike. The provisions of international human rights law also demand that all belligerent groups respect the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, attack only military targets and use only the degree of violence proportionate to their military requirement, while taking due care to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Regrettably, the practices of warring factions lag well behind the legal requirements and the global culture of the protection of civilians.

The rational dimension of the protection of civilians is critical to the attainment of lasting peace. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Special Court for Sierra Leone and other tribunals were established as instruments to combat impunity, thus holding responsible parties and individuals to account for serious violations, especially those considered to bear the greatest responsibility for violations of international humanitarian law.

Despite the systematic efforts made within the United Nations system to find ways to streamline and improve peacekeeping operations in tandem with the protection of civilians, there are still inherent challenges related to ambiguity over how the United Nations should intervene when its Members lack either the military force or, in some cases, the political will to halt all forms of carnage. Ultimately, the end-state objective of a peacekeeping operation should include protection mandates to help create an enabling environment for the host nation to exercise absolute control in protecting its citizens. Judging from my country's recent past, I would like to conclude by reaffirming Sierra Leone's interest in and commitment to addressing the challenges affecting the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

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