

## Statement by Belgium at the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council

**Mr. Buffin** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union, as well as with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians.

We also thank the Chilean presidency of the Security Council for having convened this open debate today, and the various speakers for their contributions.

Current events once again make this debate even more relevant. The situation in Syria and Iraq continues to deteriorate, and every day children are the first to suffer the effects of conflict. In Nigeria, the cynicism of the Boko Haram terrorists seems to have no limits. After kidnapping several hundreds of young students, who are still being held, Boko Haram recently used young girls wearing suicide vests to commit attacks. In those three countries in conflict, women and girls are being targeted by Boko Haram, in Nigeria, and by the pseudo Islamic State, in Iraq and Syria, precisely owing to their gender. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that the horrific crimes that are being committed do not go unpunished. We need to help the States in question to prosecute the perpetrators of such acts and, on the basis of the principle of complementarity, to allow international justice to be administered, in particular by the International Criminal Court.

We can guarantee the protection of civilians in conflict only if we involve women more in the design of strategies, policies and specific missions for that purpose, as well as in their comprehensive implementation. We encourage the Security Council and the contingent-contributing countries to ensure greater involvement by women. Furthermore, beyond conflicts and the protection of the civilians affected, greater involvement by women in social life — whether through equal access to justice, education, the means to earn their subsistence, the right to vote or the effective right to have access to the highest political and economic offices — would facilitate the reduction of community, religious and social tensions. Every one of us must rise to meet that goal and that challenge.

For its part, in 2013, Belgium put in place its second national action plan on women and peace and security for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Consistent with the fundamental goals of the resolution, the plan sets up concrete policies that allow Belgium — at home or abroad, through participation in the activities of the United Nations and other international organizations — to better promote and protect the rights of women and increase their participation in the decision-making process.

Better protection of civilians in armed conflict requires better anticipation of the occurrence of conflicts. Similarly, in an armed conflict, every United Nations official should know exactly what his or her responsibilities and obligations are, as well as those of the Organization as a whole. Good internal and external coordination of United Nations action is also required for that purpose. Through the objectives designed to meet those needs, the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative makes a significant contribution to the protection of civilians. The same can be said about the recommendation made by the Secretary-General in his 2013 report on the protection of civilians, which called for "work[ing] together to establish a common United Nations system to systematically record civilian casualties as part of broader efforts to monitor and report on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, drawing on good practice and expertise from within the United Nations, Member States and civil society." (*S/2013/689, para. 71*)

The fight against all forms of violence against women, especially sexual violence, and the condemnation thereof has been a foreign policy and development-cooperation priority in Belgium for nearly 20 years. Therefore, under the Belgian presidency of the Donor Support Group of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Red Crescent, Belgium has decided to work on that issue. The approach of the ICRC in that area is particularly interesting and worthy of note. As part of its action, the ICRC shifts the burden of proof of the existence of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence. Acts of sexual violence are now presumed to have taken place in such cases unless

proven otherwise, which enables the ICRC programmes to mainstream that presumption in its response.

Belgium also wishes to emphasize the need to provide peacekeeping missions with clear mandates to protect civilians. The protection of civilians is one of the core missions of the United Nations. However, in a 2014 report, the Office of Internal Oversight Services highlighted the tendency in peacekeeping missions not to use force to defend civilians under attack, despite the fact that the use of force is legal and in accordance with the Security Council's intentions. One explanation for that state of affairs would be a lack of clarity in mandates. By contrast, resolution 2098 (2013), on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which creates a special Intervention Brigade and authorizes it to use force to protect civilians, shows that with a clear and specific mandate, a peacekeeping mission can truly ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

The clarity of mandates is therefore fundamental but not sufficient. There must be three other elements in place — strong operational control of activities of the contingents, clarity among the troop contingents on the tactical approach, and a good working relationship between the peacekeeping operations and the humanitarian actors on the ground.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to reiterate the support of my country for France's initiative in favour of a voluntary limitation on the use of the veto in cases of mass crimes and on the implementation of the concept of responsibility to protect. This year is the tenth anniversary of the official acceptance, during the United Nations World Summit, by all Member States of the responsibility of each State to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In that context, we welcome the launch by the Secretary-General of the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. Like the rigorous application of principles of international humanitarian law at the heart of the legal obligation to protect civilians in armed conflict, the effective implementation of the responsibility to protect allows us to ensure that children, women and men do not fall prey to unnecessary suffering. Again, it is the responsibility of each of us, of each State, to ensure that that goal does not fall by the wayside.