

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

**Mr. Shingiro** (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank the President personally, and his country of Chile, for having organized this very interesting open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Allow me also to thank those who have spoken before me for the quality of their statements, which shed light on the ongoing challenges despite the progress made since 1999.

Civilians have always been the main victims of conflicts. In most contemporary conflicts, protagonists regularly flout the various resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly as well as the reports of the Secretary-General and other studies that explicitly recommend that warring parties should spare civilians. They also violate the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and all international treaties on the subject.

Today the responsibility to protect, which was launched at the 2005 World Summit of Heads of State, compels States to protect civilian populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, mass killings and other cruel and inhumane treatment. If a State fails to do so, then the international community must take its place. Obviously, any intervention of that kind must take place in strict respect for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Since the nineteenth century, as I mentioned previously, many conventions and resolutions recommend the protection of civilian populations in times of conflict. But it must be noted that civilians are still being massacred, mutilated, raped or deprived of humanitarian assistance by various parties to conflicts, all of this with disregard for the rules and conventions.

Among those attacking civilian populations there are first the fighters of negative forces in several regions of the world, especially those striking in our region of the Great Lakes of Africa. They terrorize the civilian populations to force them to provide unconditional support. They thus blatantly violate the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions which, in article 13 prohibits acts or threats of violence with the main objective of terrorizing the civilian population. Then there are the illegal actors, especially armed gangs and organized crime, which also sow terror in civilian populations by seizing goods and property and/or by practising various kinds of trafficking. In this category it is difficult to distinguish among those involved in conflict, which are a mixed bag of evil-doers, including fighters, traffickers, mercenaries and even the general population in some areas.

All civilians need protection against deliberate acts of abuse and violence. We must act collectively to defend the rights of vulnerable religious communities, which are persecuted in situations of armed conflict because of their religious convictions.

Women and girls throughout the world continue to fall victim to sexual violence in armed conflicts. That is why we must continue to work to prevent sexual violence, especially rape as a weapon of war and sexual slavery. In that connection, I am of course thinking in particular of the young Nigerian girls kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorist sect, a heinous act that we firmly condemn.

Attacks against civilians are unacceptable wherever they are committed. We denounce the strategies of using populations as human shields or weapons of war, as well as the threat created by mines and other explosive devices, which lead to heightened civilian casualties and a broader displacement of populations.

We see a bitter result, even a very bitter one. The situation of civilians is deteriorating in many areas of conflict. In Africa the situations in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Mali, in the Central African Republic, in Somalia, in South Sudan in areas where the Lord's Resistance Army has been striking, and in Côte d'Ivoire during the latest post-electoral crisis in 2011, have all revealed the degree of violence and atrocities to which combatants subject populations. Those who are most vulnerable — women, children, older people and handicapped people — pay the price of this senseless violence.

We stress that the protection of civilians in armed conflicts should not be a simple concern for

the international community. To that end, we call on the Security Council to commit itself further, both at the political and the legal levels, to put an end to these atrocities, especially by applying targeted sanctions — that are non-discriminatory — against the authors of these acts of violence against civilians, in order to put an end to impunity.

We recall that the prevention of conflicts is the best way to protect civilian populations from armed violence. Preventive diplomacy should therefore play a leading role, as it has several advantages. Not only does it make it possible to save human lives, but it is also less expensive when it comes to those paying dues as Members of the United Nations.

It is true that the Security Council has seen some progress in terms of efforts to reduce the effects of conflicts on civilians, especially with the establishment of peacekeeping missions with mandates containing provisions and strategies to protect civilians. However, it is essential to recall that efforts to protect civilians must be inclusive. We must also ensure that such efforts are not used towards adverse ends, by avoiding as far as possible the use of selective focuses or double standards to the detriment of some civilian populations in distress in some highly politicized conflict areas.

We would point out that any use of force to defend civilians must take place with total respect for the Charter of the United Nations. Any unilateral action taken in the name of any kind of theory of protection of civilians with disregard for the Charter of the United Nations should be discouraged.

Burundi highlights the need for a reaction by the international community that is always proportionate to the situation to which we are responding on the ground when it comes to protecting civilians. For example, the protection of civilians should not be an excuse for regime change, and no body of the United Nations should serve as a tool for such a change. That, as is very well known, is a prerogative for the people of the country concerned.

My delegation would like to make some brief proposals with regard to our common efforts to protect civilians during armed conflicts.

First, parties to a conflict must respect international humanitarian law and human rights law. Any violation of those rights calls for the attention and action of the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for more frequent interactions with non-State groups to ensure that they respect standards for the protection of civilians. However, that does not mean that these groups are being recognized. It simply means that those groups must be made aware of the need to respect international humanitarian law, without, however, legitimizing their position.

Thirdly, peacekeeping missions mandated to protect civilians must be able to call on the resources and the necessary forces to carry out their tasks. And we must heighten the percentage of representation of women in all peacekeeping operations and special political missions after conflicts.

Fourthly, we must work much harder to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to ensure the survival of populations that are trapped in conflicts, because those who do not die from gunfire can certainly die of hunger in areas that are made inaccessible because of fighting.

Fifthly, and lastly, when national authorities do not protect their own civilians nor take the necessary measures to bring those who commit war crimes and violate human rights to justice, the Security Council must exercise leadership for a response at the international level, while respecting the standards of the Charter of the United Nations.