

Mrs. Kafanabo (United Republic of Tanzania): At the outset, let me thank your delegation, Mr. President, for organizing this debate. We also thank Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his informative briefing. This debate comes at an opportune time, as it is taking place 60 years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, which provide for the protection of civilians in time of conflict.

It is distressing that there are still many conflict situations in many parts of the world where civilians are in dire need of protection and where their human rights and dignity are grossly violated. On 10 December 2008, we commemorated in the General Assembly 60 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In doing so, we reaffirmed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and stated, inter alia, that we have a duty to step up our efforts to promote and protect all human rights and to prevent, stop and redress all human rights violations. That is a duty we have to fulfill as we deliberate the protection of civilians in conflict.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is not an option for warring parties — it is mandatory. While parties to a conflict are duty-bound to protect civilians, in particular the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children, what we are witnessing on the ground is very different. Civilians, and in particular women and children, have become direct targets in wars. Women and children are subject to atrocities such as rape, sexual and gender-based violence, forced labour and all forms of violence. We condemn all parties that perpetuate all forms of violence and violations of human rights against civilian populations. Indeed, the protection of civilians is a matter of human rights obligations in all its manifestations, for victims are robbed of their dignity irrespective of who they are or who they support in a conflict.

It is unacceptable that civilians should be left to suffer as conflicts rage on. We must act to end impunity, in our national capacities and collectively. National and international legal systems need to be strengthened to ensure that justice takes its course for those who abuse and violate human rights and that victims are adequately compensated. We therefore urge warring parties to respect international law, in particular international humanitarian and refugee law, and allow free access for humanitarian aid and workers and ensure their protection.

The responsibility to guarantee international peace and security is a matter for all Members of the United Nations, individually and in our regional and subregional organizations. In that endeavour, we are all responsible, not only for our acts for or against peace and security, but also for acts of those in areas of our jurisdiction. The United Nations and regional and subregional organizations all have a role to play.

I will illustrate this using the African region as an example. We have the Peer Review Mechanism in tandem with the New Partnership for Africa's Development; we have various pacts and protocols at the level of African subregions, such as the Pact on Security, Stability and Development, under which a protocol on the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their property rights was elaborated. Similarly, a protocol on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, war

crimes, crimes against humanity and all forms of discrimination has been elaborated. I believe that subregional organizations elsewhere have similar instruments. The United Nations needs to collaborate with regional institutions in order to strengthen these instruments.

It is of great importance to support all efforts geared towards protecting civilians in armed conflict. The best protection for civilians is to end conflicts. It is thus of greater importance to address the causes of conflict in the first place. As the Secretary-General once said, without peace there cannot be development, and without development there cannot be peace. In that regard, we call upon the international community to work with the United Nations to cause development to prevail at sustainable levels.

Safety for civilians in camps for refugees and IDPs would go a long way towards dissuading civilians and children from following the path of war. Besides bad governance and lack of democracy, ignorance, disease and poverty are also factors driving of civilians and children to joining armed parties, be they militias or disputed Governments. Further, we call upon the States Members of the United Nations to elaborate further on the concept of the responsibility to protect, as well as on human security as additional response mechanisms in the protection of civilians and in ending conflicts.

I wish to conclude by reiterating the commitment of the Government of Tanzania to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and its willingness to work with the international community in this regard.