

Statement of Uganda: Ninth Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 7 July 2010

Mr. Mugoya (Uganda):

I thank you, Madam, for organizing this open debate. I thank the Secretary- General for his statement and Under-Secretary-General Holmes and High Commissioner Pillay for their briefings. We further thank Mr. Holmes for his dedicated service and wish him the very best in his future endeavours.

Uganda reiterates the importance it attaches to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We are concerned that civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties during situations of armed conflict. The briefings we have listened to today indicate that there have been improvements in some areas of the protection of civilians agenda. However, there remains a lot of room for improvement. We welcome the Security Council's efforts to strengthen peacekeeping mandates in the area of protection of civilians, as evidenced in the recently renewed mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Mission in the Sudan in this regard.

In Somalia, the Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam groups, which are opposed to the peace process, have continued to carry out indiscriminate attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers. They use civilians as human shields in markets and similar environments. The African Union Mission in Somalia, consistent with its mandate, has supported the Transitional Federal Government, offered greater protection to civilians, and supported the peace process.

It is important to continue efforts towards more effective engagement with non-State actors and armed groups with regard to their obligations under international law. However, it is important for all concerned to take into account specific conditions on the ground, including risk assessments. We are convinced that combating impunity and ensuring accountability for crimes and violations of human rights are fundamental prerequisites for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. When potential perpetrators know that they will be brought to account for their crimes, this serves as a deterrent. Uganda as a State party to the Rome Statute is committed to fighting impunity and ensuring justice for the victims.

At the recently concluded first Review Conference of the Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court held in Kampala from 31 May to 11 June, States parties reiterated their determination to put an end to impunity for perpetrators of the most heinous crimes of international concern. It was significant that they emphasized that justice is a fundamental building block of sustainable peace. They also declared their commitment to continuing to strengthen efforts to promote victims' rights, including their participation in judicial proceedings and claims for reparations.

It is important for all parties to armed conflict to emphasize the dignity of civilians by acknowledging losses that result from lawful combat operations. In this regard, there is a need to make meaningful amends to affected individuals and communities, such as financial assistance and funding for humanitarian aid programmes. We encourage Member States to embrace the concept of making amends, not because there is any legal obligation to do so, but simply in the interest of mitigating suffering.

Uganda calls for a more comprehensive international legal framework for the promotion and strengthening of measures to prevent, mitigate and eliminate the root causes of internal displacement. The African Union made significant progress in this regard by adopting the Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa at a summit held on 23 October 2009 in Kampala. The international community should devote more time and resources to addressing the needs of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. There is a need for greater recognition of the needs of persons with disabilities as a vulnerable group arising out of the indiscriminate use of landmines and explosive remnants of war. We call upon all subregional, regional and civil society organizations and Member States to support the victims and to undertake initiatives leading to the clearance of ordnance and the sensitization of civilian populations. In conclusion, the primary responsibility of protection of civilians lies with national authorities, but regional organizations and, ultimately, the international community, have an important role to play. We believe that this debate will draw attention to some of the issues that require greater focus.

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