

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At the Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians  
Susan E. Rice  
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations  
U.S. Mission to the United Nations  
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Thank you Mr. President. And thank you to the Secretary-General, Under Secretary-General Amos, Assistant Secretary-General Simonovic, and ICRC Director Spoerri for your statements. I also want to commend the thousands of United Nations peacekeepers, observers, humanitarian and human rights workers for their dedication to protecting civilians in harm's way, despite great challenges and risk. Mr. President, protecting civilians is a fundamental responsibility of the international community and a priority for the United States. Too many situations still cry out for stronger action. We must redouble our efforts to prevent and confront abuses of civilians.

Today, I'd like to stress three priorities for the United States: ensuring safety and access for humanitarian workers; advancing accountability; and strengthening UN capacity.

The United States is appalled by the numbers of reports of efforts to intimidate, obstruct and harm humanitarian workers. This must stop and, as stated in Resolution 1894, we must "take appropriate steps in response to deliberate attacks against humanitarian personnel."

Second, the United States strongly rejects impunity and supports efforts to hold accountable violators of international humanitarian and human rights law. The conviction of Charles Taylor by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and the International Criminal Court's judgment against Thomas Lubanga from the Democratic Republic of the Congo represent milestones for international justice. There has also been steady progress in bringing to justice those responsible for mass atrocities in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. But many perpetrators remain at large, including the key architects of genocide in Darfur, moreover, justice has not yet been rendered for the Walikale rapes nearly two years ago.

We support efforts to expose and document human rights abuses and have co-sponsored resolutions throughout the UN system stressing the need for accountability. We agree with the Secretary General that the Security Council has not spoken out enough about the failure to prevent attacks on journalists, as called for in Resolution 1738.

Third, the United States remains firmly committed to working with the international community and the United Nations to protect civilians. Over the past year, the United States has conducted a comprehensive review of our own structures and capabilities in order to develop better tools and processes to prevent atrocities. The recently released U.S. policy directive supports efforts by the Secretariat and UN field missions to review existing capabilities, identify gaps, and improve information-sharing and training. Mr. President, the Secretary General has encouraged all relevant UN entities to brief the Council on protection of civilians, which is something we strongly support. In particular, we would welcome a briefing to the Security Council on implementation of Resolution 1894 and an annual briefing on the capacity of current UN-mandated peacekeeping and special political missions with respect to their efforts to protect civilians, particularly to identify lessons learned and resources gaps. Additionally, we would ask that all relevant UN entities, in future reports to the Council, include information on the threats and vulnerabilities facing the population as well as their strategies to mitigate them.

The Security Council has proven that it can act to protect civilians under threat. The perennial question remains -- when will it? Last year, this Council and the broader international community took a principled stand, saving untold lives in Libya. As the Secretary-General said in his report, the Council's response to the situation in Libya was decisive. The Council first referred the situation to the International Criminal Court in Resolution 1970, and when Qadhafi's regime remained defiant, we adopted without opposition Resolution 1973, which contained a strong civilian protection mandate well understood by all members of this Council to authorize the use of force to prevent brutal actions by the Qadhafi regime against the Libyan

people. These actions have given Libyans a well-deserved chance to chart a future where their sovereignty, dignity and human rights are respected.

By contrast, the situation in Syria represents a colossal failure by the Security Council to protect civilians. For over a year, this Council has not been willing to protect the Syrian people from the brutal actions of their government. During our last debate on this topic in November, the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated the death toll from months of violence at 3,500. It has at least tripled since. The regime's relentless campaign of violence against its own people has grown ever more reprehensible and ever more dangerous to international peace and security. The recent suspension of operations by the UN Supervision Mission in Syria is a testament to the gravity of the situation. It is a shame that this Council continues to stand by rather than to stand up. We must take meaningful steps, including by imposing binding sanctions under Chapter VII, to pressure the Syrian regime to comply with the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan; and work towards a political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

In Sudan, the Government in Khartoum continues to fail to protect civilians by bombing civilian areas and impeding the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance. The United States strongly condemns the violations of international law and human rights abuses in Darfur and the Two Areas. We and many others have repeatedly called on the Government of Sudan to end its indiscriminate aerial bombardments and provide immediate and unrestricted humanitarian access in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states. Sudan must also guarantee unrestricted humanitarian access to all of Darfur.

In conclusion, since the Council's November 2010 Presidential Statement on the Protection of Civilians, we have witnessed robust international action to protect civilians, including in Cote D'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo and of course Libya as I've already mentioned, but also the failure to help those in dire need. The United States remains committed to the protection of civilians and will continue working with this Council and our international partners towards that end.

Thank you.

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