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Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, During a Security Council Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Susan E. Rice

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U.S. Mission to the United Nations
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AS DELIVERED

Thank you, Madame President.

Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General, Under Secretary-General Holmes and High Commissioner Pillay for their briefings and their tremendous work on behalf of endangered civilians around the world. Let me also thank Mr. Holmes for his service to the United Nations. He has been an outspoken and dedicated leader; he has shown a rare and resolute determination to end the suffering of civilians under threat of war or famine. Mr. Under Secretary-General, you have my government's abiding respect and my warm personal thanks.

Madame President, eight months after this Council adopted Resolution 1894, we still have far more work to do together to save the lives of civilians in conflict zones. The victims and situations are different: children forced to take up guns, women and girls tormented by rape and sexual abuse, refugees and internally displaced persons longing for home and shelter, ordinary people caught in the crossfire. But they are all innocent, and they should all be sheltered by the rule of law and the rules of war. Their suffering is particularly tragic because it is so often preventable. Their voices call out to our common conscience—and remind us of the urgent need to act.

Let me highlight briefly three critical areas today: first, providing the safety that humanitarian efforts need to function; second, moving from the ambition to protect civilians to successful actions by peacekeeping missions; and third, enhancing the legal capacity to support accountability.

Madame President, the United States is deeply disturbed by the increasing frequency of attacks against humanitarian workers. These assaults violate basic principles of law and decency. Such violence not only obstructs the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance, it can also create an atmosphere that restricts the movement and even the presence of international humanitarian actors. As we have recently seen in Pakistan and Sudan, workers have been attacked, kidnapped, or killed—often in cynical attempts to extend the suffering of civilians for political gain. Humanitarian agencies' local staff members can be especially vulnerable to attacks.

This is a deplorable phenomenon but not a new one. This Council has expressed its intentions, in the words of Resolution 1894, to "take appropriate steps in response to deliberate attacks against humanitarian personnel." We have also acted—for instance, by designating al-Shabab last April under Resolution 1907. We must make a concerted effort to identify those responsible for all attacks on humanitarian workers so that humanitarian agencies can go about their work protecting the innocent.

The resources of UN country teams often prove invaluable here. And the United States strongly supports the protection mandates of UNICEF, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross. Together, they help promote civilians' basic rights, meet their physical needs, respect their dignity, and work to ensure their safety. We respect the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence under which these

and other humanitarian groups, including nongovernmental organizations, operate in the field. We encourage humanitarian organizations to strengthen programs to end conflict-related sexual violence. And we urge our fellow Council members to fully support—in terms of both finances and policy—these organizations' efforts to protect civilians and to implement the commitments we unanimously agreed to in Resolution 1888.

Madame President, my second point. Peacekeeping missions play a vital role in providing support to states in which civilians are at risk. This Council's mandates directing peacekeeping missions to protect civilians must however be matched by resources, guidance, training, and leadership.

We welcome innovative approaches by all involved to identify the threats and vulnerabilities that civilians face in a mission's area. We applaud efforts by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, supported by the C-34 Committee, to develop a strategic framework for mission-wide protection strategies. As member states, we must all support these efforts and back up peacekeeping missions with political support and efforts to build capacity. We must also pay close heed to the challenges faced by peacekeepers in the field, whether civilian, police, or military personnel.

Serious challenges remain on the ground, such as those today in Darfur—something we must bear in mind as we approach UNAMID's mandate renewal at the end of this month. The United States supports full and proper backing to peacekeeping mandates—including UNAMID's—so that deployed peacekeepers can protect themselves and endangered civilians, as identified in each specific mandate. Host countries with peacekeeping missions must shoulder the primary responsibility for the safety and security of their populations, as well as for supporting those missions as they implement their mandates.

My government fully backs the work of UN peacekeeping missions, working in concert with UN country teams and host governments, to strengthen police and judicial mechanisms so that respect for the rule of law can counter those who seek to profit from lawlessness. We undertake significant efforts to promote the rule of law around the world, and we urge others to do the same.

Peacekeeping missions—when properly trained, well-equipped, and deployed with robust mandates—are critical to our overall efforts to protect civilians. But today we face the question of how to ensure that civilians are protected where strategic consent for UN peacekeeping evaporates and those forces are ultimately withdrawn.

Such a situation is now playing out in Chad with the continued draw-down of MINURCAT. By the end of the year, there will be no UN peacekeepers in Chad. And the United States is extremely concerned about this situation. The Government of Chad should protect its own population and refugees within its territory. The international community recognizes that the Government of Chad is accountable not only for the welfare of its own citizens—nearly 170,000 of whom are internally displaced—but also for the more than 270,000 Darfuri and 74,000 Central African refugees within Chad's borders.

Finally, Madame President, let me turn to the question of accountability. Governments bear the primary responsibility for protecting civilians, but other parties to armed conflict must also comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. And all too often, they do not.

Those legal obligations should have legal consequences. It's incumbent upon the international community to end impunity—by helping governments create, maintain, and operate credible and effective national courts where possible, or by supporting international and other mechanisms where necessary. The International Criminal Court can also be useful in the fight against genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Madame President, ongoing dialogue on this important subject is worthwhile. But this Council will be judged by its actions and their impact on civilians' lives. I hope that we will take concrete action to directly challenge those who violate their obligations to protect civilians in armed conflict; that we will continue to craft peacekeeping mandates that back missions with the necessary training, capability, and leadership of deployed peacekeepers; and that we, both as a Council and in our national capacities, will help governments emerging from conflict to rebuild their infrastructure and institutions to protect and provide for their civilians. In that regard, we urge the continuation of the Secretariat's important work to develop a strategic framework for the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations, supported by mission–wide planning and senior leadership training. We also urge the Secretariat to complete the assessment of resources and capabilities required for these tasks as soon as possible.

Madame President, we look forward to the Secretary-General's next report on this crucially important topic. UN action has saved untold lives and eased unimaginable suffering. But in all too many places, innocents still bear the brunt of war and conflict. We cannot afford to sleep easy until we do.

Thank you, Madame President.

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