

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

**Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): This meeting to consider the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict is very timely, in view of the tragic events that have plunged the Palestinian people in Gaza and the international community into mourning and threaten to engulf the United Nations once again in a cloud of desperation, impotence and frustration. Civilians trapped in armed conflicts and those who suffer because their neighbours are suffering hope that the purposes and principles enshrined in the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations will be applied to safeguard current and future generations from the scourge of war.

The nature of armed conflicts is changing, involving a whole series of factors that must be examined as a whole. The parties involved, the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Human Rights Council and other bodies of the system, each within their respective competencies, need to examine strategies of prevention to safeguard peace and protect civilians, looking to the underlying causes of armed conflict.

In the Gaza Strip, we are facing one of the worst types of war in the modern world: punishing the civilian population to break their morale, destroy their spirit of resistance, crush their will to fight and lead them to believe that slavery can be benign. However, the dignity of peoples has prevailed throughout history. Resistance in search of freedom and self-determination is preferable to submission to genocidal Powers.

Resolution 1674 (2006) contains valuable elements. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to emphasize that the framework established by that resolution is not exhaustive in terms of the possible actions that the international community should or could take. This is shown most clearly in the deplorable cases of inaction or excessive delay in responding on the part of the Security Council when it needs to safeguard the lives, physical integrity and basic needs of civilians in situations of armed conflict.

The recent experiences in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon are clear examples of how an outdated institution tied to the specific interests of certain States can affect civilians. It enables the parties to a conflict — or some of them — to flagrantly violate international humanitarian law and human rights.

Venezuela reiterates that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians in armed conflict rests with States. Here, the international community can play a constructive role by supporting national efforts, always respecting the framework set out in the Charter of the United Nations, and working to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela notes with concern the attempts of certain States to obstruct the debate on the concept of the responsibility to protect, set out in paragraph 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. In that connection, those countries have baselessly tried to maintain that that concept is a standard that can

be applied without engaging in the necessary discussion. Our country fully agrees with those States that have expressed the view that the Security Council is not in a position to interpret or utilize that concept before a consensus has been reached in the General Assembly. Our Government highlights the importance of the work accomplished in this area by Mr. Edward Luck, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the responsibility to protect.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict and the prevention of humanitarian crises and the commission of grave crimes against humanity can be guaranteed only in an atmosphere of cooperation, good faith and strict compliance with international law.

Without the appropriate and timely provision of humanitarian assistance, civilian populations in situations of armed conflict are condemned to prolonged suffering that may even lead to their death. For that reason, Venezuela condemns deliberate attacks against any personnel who do humanitarian work. We deplore the fact that the occupying Power, Israel, has not provided the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) with the security conditions necessary for its humanitarian activities in Gaza. The attacks on United Nations convoys and facilities constitute crimes against human rights, and those responsible must be brought to justice under the relevant international laws. The Israeli authorities must be required to provide conditions of security so that UNRWA and the other United Nations entities acting in situ can continue to assist the victims of the mad violence unleashed as a result of the military aggression perpetrated since 27 December 2008.

Finally, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reaffirms its commitment to the cause of peace and its willingness to debate, within the forum of the General Assembly, all measures aimed at the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict. We are convinced that it is within that framework that we can achieve genuine political commitment on the part of States to the development and application of the norms of international humanitarian and human rights law on behalf of civilian populations affected by armed conflict.