

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

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*):

I congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and wish you every success in executing your tasks.

The debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict continues to evoke concern and controversy. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela believes that the State bears or should bear the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians and the prevention of violations of human rights or humanitarian law during armed conflict that should be condemned in all instances.

I wish briefly to refer to the protection of civilians in armed conflict in the framework of peacekeeping operations and their mandates. The consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force are guiding principles for such operations and must be preserved. On other occasions, we have insisted that any strategy for protecting civilians must systematically address the causes that led to a conflict, including discrimination, poverty, injustice and a lack of channels for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

A functional political system founded on social justice, dialogue and coexistence is very important to conflict prevention. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, the State or parties to the conflict has or have the primary responsibility of protecting civilians. The responsibility of peacekeeping operations is limited to specific and limited occasions when it becomes necessary to protect the physical safety of civilians when there is a real danger of loss of life, and always in the context of a deployed mission or when humanitarian assistance is needed.

However, based on recent experiences, international interventions in such cases are of increasing concern. Discrepancies persist in the manner, timing and advisability of undertaking military interventions, and in identifying who is authorized to undertake them.

Great world Powers have sought to invoke seemingly noble concepts for political or military interventionist actions that undermine sovereignty. For that reason, the concept of the responsibility to protect has not attained the consensus necessary to become an instrument for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In some cases, certain States may be accused of violating human rights, whereas world Powers may undertake actions leading to coups, territorial splintering and social and economic crises. The fact that a domestic conflict has been created or stimulated from beyond its borders is obfuscated.

Those who create and encourage such crises are the ones who must be condemned

and punished. Not infrequently — and history provides plenty of examples — an international intervention ends up supporting those who breach and violate human rights. Foreign interventions thereby undermine the sovereignty of States. At other times, conflict situations are ignored in which it does not suit transnational interests to provide international solidarity, as the State violating human rights acts as the intermediary for those interests. Some Powers brandish rhetoric of humanitarianism and human rights, but they undermine and distort the true nature of those rights. The case of Iraq is emblematic of that.

In recent decades, we have seen a succession of various concepts and categories that tend towards neocolonial domination. We understand the reasons why many countries of the South would identify with a concept such as the responsibility to protect, for instance. We understand their concerns, since international solidarity is essential. But international solidarity is one thing and intervention in order to dominate is another. We must show a common front for solidarity and unite to reject intervention that oppresses peoples. We must reject the concept of the responsibility to protect, for it disguises the violation of sovereignty in order to promote neo-colonial interests.

When it comes to providing support to a people, there is near unanimity as to the serious violation of human rights and international humanitarian law by the State of Israel through its occupation of Gaza. Why do we not then protect the Palestinian people and decisively help them to become a sovereign State?

The financial leadership that currently governs the world is predicated on increased military expenditures, financial speculation and economic policies that foster the recessive trends being experienced throughout the world. That crushing reality produces wars and poverty and the destruction of the planet and of sovereignty, human rights and democratic systems. That is the basic cause of conflicts. It is up to the United Nations to consistently implement, for the benefit of peoples and not the interests of the powerful, the Charter and the other legal instruments and resolutions that sovereign States have established through the years for the good of humankind and the planet.

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