

Statement by
H.E. Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Løj
Permanent Representative of Denmark



United Nations Security Council

Open debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

New York
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Let me begin by expressing our gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jørgen Egelund, for his clear and thought-provoking briefing on the current situation for civilians in armed conflicts.

Furthermore, I would like to fully associate my delegation with the statement to be delivered later in the debate by Austria on behalf of the European Union.

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Every state and the international community as a whole have a responsibility to protect our fellow human beings in particular during armed conflicts. We all confirmed this at the 2005 World Summit. Unfortunately, this as a responsibility we have not always honoured. We need to do more.

Our efforts to implement the established framework for protection of civilians do not start in a vacuum. OCHA has developed the ten-point platform with priorities for action and provided the Council with an aide-memoire to assist in the development of protection mandates. It is time for us once again to evaluate the effectiveness of these tools. They might need to be updated but in particular we need to make better use of these tools in the daily work of the Council.

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Allow me to make a few comments on the way ahead as we see it.

As recently witnessed by members of the Security Council visiting Sudan and the DRC, the continued targeting of civilians in current situations of conflict is unacceptable. If states are unable or unwilling to provide protection for all - including children, women and representatives of the free press - the international community must react to stop the pattern of violence – local authorities clearly have an obligation to provide their full cooperation to facilitate these efforts. Physical protection, the restoration of law and order and the fight against impunity must be key priorities for bringing the violence to an end.

Humanitarian access is essential. Assistance and protection activities must be provided as promptly as practically possible. The Security Council must consequently take all steps to enable full, safe and unhindered access for United Nations and humanitarian personnel. Denial of – or attacks on - humanitarian operations are unacceptable and must be met with an appropriate response.

Efforts to protect civilians in situations of conflict must be more predictable, timely and systematic. In emerging conflict situations the Security Council should establish an effective peacekeeping presence as early as possible. The peacekeepers should be provided with a realistic but also clear and "robust" mandate to protect civilians and provide a secure environment – this includes providing security in and around camps for refugees and internally displaced persons.