



Statement on behalf of the European Union

by

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on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict**

in the Security Council

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(Check against delivery)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. Armenia, Iceland, Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the President of the Security Council, Johan Verbeke, for the opportunity to discuss this important issue. I would also like to extend our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General, John Holmes, for his very informative briefing.

Today, the protection of civilians in armed conflict is more important than ever. While the number of conflicts has declined since 1989, the number of civilians suffering the effects of armed conflict is continuously growing. Parties to conflict increasingly demonstrate a disregard for the basic provisions of international humanitarian law. Not only do civilians account for the vast majority of casualties in situations of armed conflict; more and more frequently, civilians are themselves becoming the primary objects of violence.

Mr. President,

The EU is concerned about the growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide. We have just heard about tragic situations in Africa. Right now, we witness another tragedy in the Middle East. The EU welcomes the approval by the UN Central Emergency Response Fund of nearly 6 million US dollars to Palestinian refugees who are fleeing the fighting in and around the Nahr El Bared refugee camp. The EU is also pleased that, through contributions made by the European Commission and some of its Member States in their national capacity, further funds have been made available. Overall, the Flash Appeal for 12.7 million dollars has been met.

Women, children and other vulnerable groups are especially affected by armed conflict. Sexual exploitation and abuse remain widespread atrocities affecting millions of victims. It is estimated, for example, that 40 women are raped every day in South-Kivu. Such violence is not an inevitable consequence of war, it needs to be prevented! Sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel is also unacceptable. The EU welcomes the zero-tolerance policy that has been introduced by the UN and has adopted the same in its own European Security and Defence operations.

The illegal recruitment of child soldiers must end. Currently, an estimated 300,000 child soldiers participate in armed conflicts. Recently, we have heard alarming reports from Sri Lanka. But there are also some encouraging developments: In Sudan, the Sudan Liberation Movement signed an agreement on 12 June to begin handing over children associated with its armed groups. Previously, similar agreements have led to the release of several hundreds of former child soldiers in Cote d'Ivoire. In the Republic of the Congo, UN peacekeepers and the Congolese police have now launched a six-month law enforcement and sensitization campaign to improve the protection of children.

Mr. President,

The growing number of journalists being killed is also extremely disturbing. Just recently, UNESCO voiced grave concern over the alarming increase in the number of journalists who lost their lives in Iraq in the last month. Security Council Resolution 1738 on the safety and security of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel has become even more relevant.

Equally disturbing is the number of humanitarian personnel being killed and attacked while on missions to help people in need. We strongly condemn the recent killings of two workers of the Lebanon Red Cross, of two Red Cross workers in Sri Lanka, of two UN workers in Gaza, of a member of Médecins sans frontières in the Central African Republic, of a member of Caritas International in Darfur and all other killings of humanitarian personnel.

Mr. President,

International standards for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts are largely in place.

On 8 June we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the two Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 that are essential for strengthening the protection of civilians by prohibiting attacks on the civilian population and on objects indispensable for their survival.

Also, international human rights law continues to be applicable to everyone within the jurisdiction of the state concerned in time of armed conflict.

At the 2005 World Summit the Heads of States established the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The EU welcomes the reaffirmation of the responsibility to protect by the Security Council in subsequent resolutions, including resolution 1674.

Security Council Resolution 1612 sets an enhanced framework for the protection of children in armed conflict. The EU is currently developing country-specific recommendations for its actions in countries in which children are affected by armed conflicts as part of the “EU Implementation Strategy for Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict”, adopted in April 2006. I would like to take this opportunity to recall the important adoption in February 2007 of the Paris Commitments and Principles against the illegal recruitment of child soldiers.

International humanitarian law urges all parties to allow full, unimpeded access by humanitarian personnel to civilians in need of assistance. Furthermore, all those concerned are encouraged to make available all necessary facilities for the operations, and to promote the safety, security and freedom of movement of humanitarian, UN and associated personnel, as well as their assets.

The International Criminal Court, International Criminal Tribunals and Special Courts as well as reconciliation commissions are working to end impunity. Ending impunity is essential if a society in conflict or recovering from conflict is to come to terms with past abuses committed against civilians affected by armed conflicts as well as to prevent future such abuses.

In 2001, the United Nations adopted a programme of action aimed at preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The proliferation and misuse of these weapons constitute the primary source of civilian deaths. Under German chairmanship, the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures in New York works closely with the UN to identify support for states in their endeavour to reduce and control these arms and their ammunition. In 2005, the EU adopted its own strategy to combat their illicit accumulation and trafficking.

Mr. President,

We need to continue to strengthen these standards and to ensure their full implementation. Let me point out three areas of priority for international action:

1. Worldwide recognition of standards

The EU calls on Member States that have not done so to ratify and support the existing conventions and resolutions forming the legal framework for the protection of civilians and to implement them fully within their national legal systems. The EU also calls upon all Member States to abide by and to support all resolutions relating to the protection of civilians.

2. Clear and sufficiently robust Security Council mandates for peacekeeping operations

As pointed out in Resolution 1674, mandates have to include provisions regarding the protection of civilians within their zones of operation, the facilitation of the provision of humanitarian access and, finally, the creation of conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The EU strongly supports Under-Secretary-General Holme's request for support of the Council in situations in which access to humanitarian work is being denied. We also agree that it might be useful to evaluate the practical effects that the inclusion of language concerning the protection of civilians has actually had on the ground.

3. Prevention

Civilian suffering should be prevented in the first place. Early action in case of simmering conflicts is therefore critical. Timely briefings by the Secretary-General, his Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and other relevant actors are extremely helpful in drawing the attention of the international community to areas where conflicts are prone to erupt.

Mr. President,

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a complex task. The EU is fully committed to meeting this challenge. In cooperation with the United Nations, the EU continues its work for the promotion of peace and conflict prevention so that in the future, one day, human suffering can end.