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Statement

By

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AT THE

SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE

ON THE

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT

New York,
Wednesday, June 28, 2006

Madam President,

Allow me to express my delegation's sincere thanks to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Jan Egeland for his comprehensive briefing.

The Security Council has since its consideration of the tragic plight of civilians trapped in armed conflict, worked assiduously to counter such gross violations as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse. indeed, the adoption of resolutions 1265, 1296 and 1674 demonstrates the Council's determination to take appropriate measures against this menace.

It has generally been recognized, and rightly so, that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians in armed conflict rests with their governments. By the tenets of international humanitarian law and resolutions of the Security Council, this responsibility has also been extended to non-state actors, especially belligerent groups involved in the conflicts.

Madam President,

Despite the Security Council's commitment to this cause, the gross violation of fundamental rights of civilians in armed conflict has not abated as evidenced by the atrocities they continue to suffer. Regrettably, the majority of the principal victims are women and children, whose contributions to nation building are crucial. Invariably, they suffer the worse consequences of these inhumane actions, particularly sexual exploitation and abuse, forced recruitment into armed groups, displacement from their homes and separation from their families.

It is against this background that my delegation considers this debate as timely and opportune since, in our view, it facilitates the Security Council's formulation of more concrete, realistic and achievable measures towards realizing the underlying objectives that informed the adoption of its various resolutions on this issue. We need not remind ourselves that the Security Council's efforts could be measured not by eloquent statements and declarations, but by how far its actions address effectively the violations of international humanitarian law and human rights of victims in armed conflict.

Madam President,

The fundamental question, therefore, is how to ensure that both governments and armed groups uphold the provisions enshrined in international humanitarian law in respect of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Based on my government's firm conviction on human rights, we hold the view that in the event of the failure by both governments and armed groups to abide by their commitments under international humanitarian law, conventions and agreements, it behoves the United Nations to intervene and protect innocent populations against such crimes as genocide, ethnic cleansing and other gross human rights violations. In this connection, we welcome recent measures by the Security Council to strengthen United Nations role to this end, as witnessed during MONUC's operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Such robust measures lucidly demonstrates to other belligerents the UN's resolve to prevent their nefarious activities and undoubtedly deter the infringement of civilian rights in conflict areas..

Madam President,

With the support of the international community, the International Criminal Court could contribute immensely towards containing and combating crimes against innocent populations in conflict areas. Indicted persons, seeking sanctuary in various countries must be apprehended and handed over to the International Criminal Court for prosecution. The arrest and handing over of the former Liberia leader, Charles Taylor to the Special Court of Sierra Leone, is worthy of emulation.

Given the UN's pivotal role in the provision of humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons and other victims of war whose predicament is intolerable and dehumanizing, the Security Council should consider strengthening the role of UN peacekeepers to enable them discharge their cardinal and onerous responsibility to ensure that humanitarian agencies provide requisite assistance and services in a safe and secure environment.

Madam President,

Our common objective to combat these reprehensible acts by callous and unprincipled persons would be a mirage unless we strive to attain the universality of all relevant international legal instruments relating to humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Protocols. Undoubtedly, the United Nations has, since its establishment almost 61 years ago, been regarded as the beacon of hope for the unfortunate victims of war and it should be seen to be discharging, in a consistent manner, its duties in this regard if we are to abide by our Charter commitments.

I thank you, Madam President.