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Statement by Ambassador Kenzo Oshima
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On Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
Security Council
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Japan is pleased that the Security Council continues to give close attention to the plight of civilians in armed conflict. We therefore welcome today's open debate and thank USG John Holmes for his briefing on the progress that has been made. And we commend OCHA for playing the leading role in this area.

Real and concrete progress has in fact been made towards the goal of protecting innocent civilians. The Security Council has adopted a number of normative instruments, including resolution 1674. And with regard to the issue of the protection of journalists in conflict, which was raised in the open debate last December, we welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 1738.

For Japan, the protection of civilians is a high priority, as we believe it is essential to human security. The UN Trust Fund for Human Security, which is administered by OCHA and to which my government has made substantial contributions, has accordingly taken great interest in projects that address issues such as conflict prevention, post-conflict peace-building, landmines, IDPs, and refugees, giving support to more than fifty projects over the years. For example, the Trust Fund has assisted in promoting recovery and sustainable livelihoods for that part of the Sri Lankan population which has been affected by internal conflict. Most recently, on the 29th of May, the Government of Japan and the United Nations decided to extend assistance through the Trust Fund for Human Security to a project that aims at the protection, reintegration and resettlement of IDPs in Somalia.

The Central Emergency Response Fund has also helped to ensure a predictable flow of financing for efforts to protect civilians in neglected crises, which we all welcome.

I would like to touch upon today four aspects of the protection of civilians.

Allow me to start with the Security Council, which we commend for the significant progress it has made in this area. Specifically, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has effected improvements in the situation of children in armed conflict through the monitoring and reporting mechanism the Council established in resolution 1612.

At the same time, we are deeply troubled by the large number of civilians affected by conflict – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, Somalia, and other embattled parts of the world – who continue to be in desperate need of protection and assistance. We deplore the fact that civilians have with increasing frequency become the primary targets of violence, even as we have witnessed a steady decline in the number of conflicts over the last few years. We also condemn the harassment, intimidation, and murder of humanitarian workers in crises around the world, but condemnation is not enough. World leaders formally acknowledged “the responsibility to protect populations” at the 2005 Summit, and it was reaffirmed by the Security Council in its resolution 1674. Yet these words have not adequately been translated into action. We need to discuss in this body what other concrete measures we can take.

One such measure is the Aide-Memoire adopted by the Council in 2002 as a tool to bridge the normative instruments this Council develops and concrete action on the ground. In particular, it has proven useful in the process of formulating a peacekeeping mandate. This useful tool should not be shelved but continue to be put to good use. And to be useful, it should be reviewed and updated from time to time.

Proper monitoring in order to provide early warning is another mechanism in place that contribute to the protection of civilians, and timely

briefings from the officials responsible, including the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the High Commissioners for Refugees and for Human Rights, should therefore be provided.

Second, we need to strengthen our efforts to protect IDPs. We support the recommendation of the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence that the humanitarian agencies should clarify their mandates and enhance cooperation in this area. We also welcome the start of the informal consultation on humanitarian issues this week. Japan for its part intends to participate constructively in the discussion on this subject in whichever forums it takes place, including OCHA and the Executive Committee of the UNHCR.

Third is the question of impunity. The question of how to strike the proper balance between national reconciliation and punishment of those who have done wrong, and also between peace and justice, needs to be considered further. Yet there can be no doubt that establishing the rule of law contributes greatly to a durable peace and to stability. Japan has accordingly been taking initiatives in this field. It has actively supported the KR Tribunal in Cambodia, for example, and it welcomes the recent important progress made that brings the commencement of the trial closer. Japan hopes that the trial will proceed smoothly and with all due speed. To that end, it is vital that the United Nations and Member States continue to support Cambodia.

With regard to the International Criminal Court (ICC), Japan has completed the necessary legislative procedures so that it may participate in the ICC, and plans to join the Court formally by the fall of this year. In doing so, our hope will be that we can contribute further to the prevention and even eradication of many serious crimes, to strengthening the rule of law and the maintenance of peace and security.

Fourth and lastly, I would like to underline the importance of regional initiatives to ensure the implementation of normative frameworks and principles relating to the protection of civilians. It is clear that the involvement of relevant regional organizations is desirable and beneficial.

Accordingly, we welcome the regional conference organized by OCHA in April in Dakar. We hope to be able to work with OCHA to hold a similar conference in Asia at an appropriate time.

In conclusion, all the efforts of the international community for the protection of civilians must ultimately be judged by the number of people actually protected and saved. Any concrete action that contributes to this ultimate objective should be pursued, including removing anti-personnel mines, timely and sufficient delivery of food and medical support to people in distress, exercising maximum care to avoid civilian casualties in counter-insurgency operations and political efforts to end or contain conflicts. We are also concerned about the humanitarian toll that unexploded cluster munitions can cause. Putting the priority on the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Japan will continue to constructively participate in the discussion on this problem in various international forums.

The protection of civilians must be the concern of all Member States, and the Security Council should therefore continue to act to provide the needed leadership and to monitor developments closely. I assure you that Japan will do its part.

Thank you.