



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

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Delivered at the

SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE
ON
PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT

NEW YORK, 22 JUNE 2007

Mr. President,

My delegation appreciates your initiative to convene this debate on the "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", more especially, this time, that in spite of the unweaving efforts of the international community to douse conflicts in our society, new cases are rapidly evolving while expectations to deal decisively with those already in place are becoming disappointingly wishful. We believe that the time has come for the international community to re-examine when it is its responsibility to protect civilians, without prejudice to the sovereignty of Member States. The genocide in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and the crimes committed against unarmed civilians in areas of conflict, especially in Africa serves as a constant reminder that we have to search for a generally acceptable understanding when the international community exercises its responsibility to protect. We equally thank your predecessor for the wonderful way they handled the affairs of the Council last month. We expect that Member States will use this opportunity to reflect and exchange views on the precarious and daunting challenges facing unarmed civilians in conflict situations.

We acknowledge the fact that non-combatant civilians are increasingly the first fatal casualties and carry the burden of discomfort during armed conflicts, the cause of which are usually not of their own making. In this regard, apart from untimely deaths, resulting from deliberate armed attacks by contending parties seeking reprisals, the social, cultural and economic lives of these non-combatant, non-parties to conflicts which include the aged, women, children and youths are unfortunately adversely affected. Civilians often become pawns in the deadly game that has neither rules nor respect for the dignity of persons.

It is inhuman, to say the obvious that among the heavy tolls, which conflicts impose on civilians include denial of access to medical care. The situation is more precarious for people with disabilities and afflicted with age – related discomforts and others with serious diseases who along with the healthy endure the burdens associated with refugee status within and outside their countries.

It is therefore the belief of my delegation that this open debate will help the international community to focus attention principally on the urgent task of protecting and safeguarding civilians wherever conflicts erupt.

In this regard, Nigeria welcomes the increased capacity of the African Union to forestall and resolve armed conflicts and protect civilians in war situations through its Peace and Security Council. We equally welcome the valuable extension of logistical support from the United States of America and the European Union for the African Union Peacekeeping Operations in the Darfur region of Sudan.

We appreciate the renewed United Nations/African Union partnership aimed at identifying specific cases in which the United Nations could (as a matter of improving African capacity for peace operations), assist African Union respond to capacity building requirements, including the capacity for monitoring the conduct of parties to conflicts. Condemnations by Member States of the United Nations of rape and sexual assaults on women, as well as, angst by the generality of human rights advocates against the enlistment of child – soldiers into combat affray in the name of wars are veritable and salutary means of protecting civilians in conflict situations.

My delegation believes that the expansion of the scope and definition of war crimes and crime against humanity to include rape, enforced prostitution, trafficking, enslavement and torture has resulted in an increase in the

number of persons brought to the International Tribunals for acts committed against civilians in the course of armed conflicts.

Mr. President,

In order to strengthen the above laudable initiatives and even more, initiatives already embarked upon by the international community to bring succour to hapless civilians caught up in tragic consequences they hardly provoke or facilitate, my delegation further wishes to urge States that have not done so, to adopt, ratify and or codify in their national laws, the various Conventions and Protocols on the law of armed conflicts and ensure the implementation of the provision. This calls for a more result-oriented strengthening of legal frameworks and mechanisms for monitoring and reporting attacks against civilians by States and non-state actors.

My delegation wishes to re-emphasize that one other way to protect civilians from the pangs of armed conflicts is by way of conflict prevention. Practice has shown that it costs less to prevent conflicts than to control them. Within the West African sub-region for instance, in the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS), Nigeria has been steadily coordinating initiatives with other Member States of the Community in bringing about peaceful resolution of conflicts within and among the Member States and other States contiguous to Nigeria. This makes tremendous positive sense in preventing possible civilian casualties were parties to resort to wars. Apart from that, conflict-free-situations are more amenable to industry, economic growth, human and social development.

Mr. President,

Unfortunately, conflicts are inevitable consequences of diversities of behaviour in man. We should always therefore expect it and should continue to mainstream civilian protections into the United Nations and regional peacekeeping operations. More importantly we should tackle the root causes of conflicts with open and mutually compromising spirit of give and take. It is rest to the weary, daylight to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad and nature's best antidote for trouble.

I thank you.