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AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE

ON

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT

New York

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Mr President,

We would like to thank the Secretary General for his report. This report comes on the 10th anniversary of the consideration by the Security Council of the Protection civilians as a thematic issue. It is deplorable that civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties and continue to be targeted and subjected to indiscriminate attacks and other violations. Civilians continue to be victims of targeted attacks, forced displacement, sexual violence, forced conscription, indiscriminate killings, mutilation, hunger, disease and loss of livelihoods.

Over the last ten years, the Council has received several reports and also adopted several presidential statements and resolutions with specific attention given to the protection of civilians. While such developments are commendable, they are of limited value if they do not translate into concrete improvements in the protection of civilians on the ground. We need to commit ourselves to practical action and a clear path from policy statements to actual implementation. We need to move forward and develop a more systematic approach to protection of civilians that translates immediately into practical action on the ground.

Mr President

The inclusion of protection activities in the mandates of peacekeeping missions, such as MONUC was a significant action by the Security Council to this end. Furthermore, over the years the Security Council has taken important steps to improve protection for specific groups such as women and children. The Council has also endeavored to enhance protection for refugees and internally displaced persons by mandating peacekeeping missions to protect camps and sites from armed attacks and to maintain their civilian and humanitarian character by supporting the disarmament and separation of combatants.

However, there is need for a common understanding among UN Member States about what peacekeeping should be mandated to do - and can do. Questions such as the degree of robustness of modern UN peacekeeping, how protection of civilians' mandates can best be implemented, or what early peace building tasks should be undertaken by UN peacekeepers – and for how long – need to be answered. These peacekeeping activities require a stronger consensus among contributors as to what is expected of personnel and what they require to fulfill these objectives.

Mr President

The proliferation and fragmentation of non-State armed groups has contributed to the increasingly asymmetric nature of conflict. We have seen this in places such as Somalia. This has had a profoundly negative impact on civilians, as armed groups have

sought to overcome their military inferiority by using strategies that flagrantly violate international law, including attacks against civilians and the use of civilians to shield military objectives.

Although these armed groups are bound by international humanitarian law and must refrain from committing acts that would impair the enjoyment of human rights, we know that for some groups such as the LRA, attacks and the commission of other violations against civilians are deliberate strategies, intended to maximize casualties and destabilize communities. There should be no immunity for violators. Indeed all violators should be held accountable before since ending impunity is central to settling conflict.

Mr President

As partners it is critical that Member States support, or at least do not impede, efforts by other parties such as; Religious organizations, traditional leaders and civil society organizations to engage armed groups in order to seek improved protection for civilians. However, the reality is that many times this engagement proves futile. When such efforts fail, alternatives must be considered, which should not be restricted to condemnation of violations committed by armed groups and demands for compliance together with the application of targeted measures. These should include offensive actions against those responsible.

Mr President

While the Security Council has indicated its intention to ensure that mandates include clear guidelines as to what missions can and should do to protect civilians, this clear direction from the Council should be informed by a realistic assessment of what is on the ground. It is necessary that consultations are undertaken with the Secretariat, troop and police contributors, regional organizations and more especially countries in the affected region. We have seen some of the dividends of such collaboration in the Great Lakes region. Currently, there is a disconnect between mandates, intentions, expectations, interpretations and real implementation capacity because of some of these omissions.

However, this should take place within a broader policy framework that includes clear direction as to possible courses of action, including in situations where the armed forces of the host State are themselves perpetrating violations against civilians.

Mr President

The report provides pertinent recommendations premised on the overriding need to enhance compliance and accountability in conflict. On our part we will underscore two of them which we consider critical in the protection of civilians and achieving a sustainable peace;,

Firstly; renewal of peacekeeping mandates should ensure that relevant protection concerns and possible responses are incorporated into the Council's actions;

Secondly; the timely deployment, of peacekeeping missions with robust protection mandates should be done to ensure the protection of civilians on the ground. Collaboration with key players such as countries in the region is important.

Finally, the protection of civilians does not stop with the end of hostilities. Ensuring that civilians receive needed humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and reconstruction is key for sustainable peace and recovery.

I thank You