

# **Statement by H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation at the open debate of the Security Council on “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict”**

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Mr. President, On behalf of the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and OIC General Secretariat, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Your Excellency, your team and your country for assuming the Presidency of the Security Council and for the successful steering the work of the Council this month including holding of this important open debate. Mr. President, It is quite unfortunate, and in fact unacceptable, that throughout the world, the civilians endure the heaviest cost of armed conflicts, no matter what the scale, nature or locations of those conflicts are. Acts of violence carried out by both states and non-state armed groups make the civilians, be they men, women, children or elderly, suffer from unspeakable hardships, and violations of human rights. As expressed earlier by this Council, it is deeply regrettable that civilians account for most of the casualties in armed conflict, including as a result of deliberate targeting, indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks and sexual and gender-based violence, as well as other acts that violate international humanitarian and human rights law. Ever since this Council has taken up the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict in 1999 with its adoption of the resolution 1265, and various others thereafter, an international normative framework has emerged. However, the ongoing armed conflicts, conflicts perpetuated by one state's illegal occupation of another's territory, and their impact on the civilians warrant that there is still much more to do in order to tackle the

core challenges outlined in the UN Secretary General's report. This Council is expected more than ever to assume its responsibility to spearhead international community's efforts to enhance compliance of parties to conflict, both states and non-state armed groups, with international law, to enhance the UN peacekeeping missions' protection capabilities while respecting the states' sovereignty as enshrined in the UN Charter. Improving humanitarian access to the victims of armed conflict, and ensuring accountability for violations of international law, as well as international humanitarian and human rights law are also among the challenges that this Council has to tackle on behalf of the international community. Mr. President, Aside from legal, structural and operational challenges, the real and grave challenge that needs the urgent action of this Council is the ongoing violence in Syria, which has cost the lives of more than sixty thousand Syrians, and displaced more than seven hundred thousand others. As a matter of fact, the conflict in Syria puts this Council's, and the international community's ability to protect civilians in armed conflict to a clear test. It is regrettable that neither this Council nor the international community has passed this test yet although so many civilians have died, many others maimed, and displaced. I am particularly disappointed that the Syrian leadership perpetuated violence against its own people. As the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, we have been very actively involved from the very beginning in every effort to provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrians victimized by the ongoing conflict. And in this regard, we are closely cooperating with the OCHA. The OIC Department for Humanitarian Affairs is working to provide assistance to the Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries. Here once again, I reiterate our call on the Security Council to assume its responsibility to do its utmost to protect the Syrian people and bring a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict through a political dialogue. Mr. President, Ensuring accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law is a sine-qua-non for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As encouraged by the UN Secretary General in his 2012 report, this Council is expected to ensure such accountability for each and every member state without exception. Yet, Israel, continues to enjoy impunity despite its flagrant violations of international law, as well as international humanitarian and human rights law. The Palestinian People, be they in the West Bank or Gaza, continue to suffer under the illegal measures imposed by the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian people's aspirations to realize its legitimate right to freedom, sovereignty, and self-determination in its own independent state and in its own homeland, with East Jerusalem as its capital, should no longer be denied. Continuation of confiscation of Palestinian properties and construction of the illegal Israeli settlements on the occupied territories should be seen as the biggest challenge to the credibility of the UN Security Council. The UN General Assembly's recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer state constitutes a timely and fundamental opportunity, which should be utilized in full in order to give a renewed momentum to the currently deadlocked peace process. Both Palestinian and Israeli people deserve a permanent peace. It is long overdue for Israeli and Palestinian Peoples to live side by side and in peace and security. Mr. President, Protection of civilians in armed conflict represents only one aspect of the challenge of protecting civilians. Civilians are also increasingly getting targets of terrorism and extremism as well as maybe ironically of counter-terrorism measures. Certainly nobody can deny the right of states' counter-terrorism efforts through law enforcement

agencies to combat terrorism. However, utmost should be done not to harm the civilians and reduce them to collateral damage. Civilians also suffer during eruptions of violence due to simmering and unaddressed intercommunal hatred and resentment situations, as was recently witnessed by the Muslim Rohingya minority in the Rakhine State in Myanmar. Speaking of the unaddressed problems, I should stress the importance of responding to the needs of refugees displaced by armed conflict. In this regard, as the OIC, we are particularly concerned with the continuing plight of the Azeri refugees forced to leave their homes in the Nagorno-Karabagh region and seven adjacent regions of Azerbaijan. We are also concerned with the deliberate targeting of certain groups of people by the non-state armed groups or terrorists. Targeting and kidnapping of the UN or other international staff, humanitarian assistance workers or volunteers, health workers or teachers is unacceptable. In this regard, I strongly condemn the killing of health workers engaged with the national polio vaccination campaigns. I also condemn killing of worshippers in places of worship as abhorrent, inhuman acts. I also condemn and reject the arguments of those who distort the teachings of Islam by killing, kidnapping or harming innocent civilians or by undermining their security. Mr. President, Finally, I would like to express the commitment of the OIC General Secretariat to work with the United Nation for the protection of civilians. In this regard, we highly appreciate the dedicated efforts particularly of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR, UNICEF, OCHA as well as ICRC in this field. I would also like to pay tribute to all UN peacekeeping personnel and to unarmed civilian peacekeepers that are protecting civilians in a variety of trouble spots around. Thank you, Mr. President

## **Other Press**

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