Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

‘Protecting civilians transcends politics’

2014-02-12

Thank you Madame President for holding this important debate today, and thank you to High Commissioner Pillay, to Under-Secretary-General Amos, to Under-Secretary-General Ladsous, and to ICRC Director General Daccord for your compelling, and thoughtful contributions to this debate. The specific examples that you’ve used are sobering and underline the importance of the subject that is before us now.

Madame President,

Fifteen years ago the Security Council formally committed for the first time to protect civilians in armed conflict, when it adopted resolution 1265. In the wake of mass atrocities in Rwanda and in Bosnia, it was increasingly clear that the international community could no longer stand by and witness the massacres of innocent people. And yet as we move towards the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, we continue to bear witness to the most brutal violations of human rights in conflict – from Syria to South Sudan to the Central African Republic. It is vital that we step up our efforts to prevent and respond to such atrocities.

Before I move on to the topic of today’s debate, I do want to thank the Secretary-General for his report and reiterate our full endorsement of UN efforts to enhance their role in safeguarding human rights around the world through the ‘Rights Up Front’ action plan. Our objective today is to establish broad support for the UN’s key role of protecting civilians. That’s why I think so many of you are here today to listen to and to participate in this debate. Politics and protecting civilians should not be mixed. Protecting civilians transcends politics. Sovereignty matters, but so too do the global norms that underpin the protection that we are seeking to uphold. Yves Daccord reminded us just now, of how essential this is for organisations such as the ICRC and, in particular, for the individuals that they serve. We are pleased that the Presidential Statement adopted today reiterates some of the most basic principles and commitments that have been made over the years by the Security Council on this agenda, including through the attached Aide Memoire. That Aide Memoire has been painstakingly compiled from existing and agreed Council texts. It establishes a clear baseline against which we operate and as Hervé Ladsous has reminded us, clarity is vital for those who operate in dangerous situations in the field.

Yesterday the Security Council heard from Valerie Amos about the humanitarian challenges faced in the crisis in South Sudan. Today, she has set out clearly the huge difficulties being

faced also in Syria and in the Central African Republic. Tomorrow, she will brief the Council on Syria. We believe the Council can and must play a key role in alleviating the impact on civilians of crises such as these. That is why we strongly support agreement on a humanitarian resolution for Syria, to improve the lives of the Syrian people who are bearing the burden of the violence in their country. There can be no justification for any country standing in the way of a resolution that is designed to allow civilians access to food and medical assistance.

Madame President,

Early action to prevent conflict and mass human rights abuses remains vital. This must start long before peacekeepers may be required. And once peacekeeping missions are deployed, their protection mandates are a fundamental part of the UN's ability to protect civilians in conflict. They must be fully implemented. Priority should be given to Protection of Civilians in mission planning assessments, allocation of resources, and in activities on the ground.

We encourage all mandated missions to develop protection strategies and to use all the assets of the mission to achieve this. We urge mission leadership to establish effective coordination mechanisms that include all relevant departments, that enhance data collection and analysis, and that improve early warning and rapid response. From the police and military to civilian personnel, where a mission is mandated to protect civilians, this should be at the centre of their daily work.

We welcome the positive steps taken by missions, as outlined in the concept paper, and encourage greater sharing of best practice between them. Regular opportunities to analyse strengths and weaknesses are also important, and more information should be shared with the Council in country reports and briefings to highlight the challenges that Missions face every day. As Navi Pillay urged, we welcome effective use of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy to hold perpetrators accountable, including by MONUSCO following the horrific Minova rapes in 2012. We urge its more consistent application elsewhere.

The United Kingdom commends the UN Mission in South Sudan for opening its doors to tens of thousands of South Sudanese civilians fleeing the eruption of brutal violence in December. I think this is something that this Council really needs to take note of. UNMISS' actions saved people's lives, and it continues to work hard – with humanitarian actors – to protect the 75,000 people sheltering on its bases. We will continue to support the Mission as it seeks to protect civilians more widely, including through monitoring and reporting on human rights violations and abuses, and supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The planning, allocation and effective use of resources is vital. The UK provides extra budgetary funds to the UN's Department for Peacekeeping Operations for the Protection of Civilians coordination unit and the development of pre-deployment training modules on

conflict related sexual violence for military, police and civilians. We encourage all Member States to consider providing similar support.

Madame President,

The protection of civilians is amongst the Council's foremost responsibilities. As peacekeepers must consider the protection of civilians in every aspect of their work, so must we. Hervé Ladsous rightly reminded us of peacekeeping's limits as well of its great strengths. It is therefore essential that we take our responsibilities and use the Council's authority to ensure States shoulder their primary responsibility to prevent conflict, minimise suffering and ensure that the cycles of conflict and pain are not repeated.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/protecting-civilians-transcends-politics