

Statement by

H.E. Mr. David Donoghue

Permanent Representative

at the

UN Security Council open debate:

“Protection of civilians in armed conflict”

New York, 12 February 2014

Check against delivery

Madame President,

I wish to align my delegation at the outset with the statement delivered on behalf of the EU and its member States.

In his most recent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Secretary General concludes that “the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism”. His report describes in stark terms the violence, insecurity and human rights violations which are at present characteristic of Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, eastern DRC, Iraq, Mali, South Sudan and Syria.

Although these conflicts and insecure environments have their own distinctive features, they have at least one element in common: it is civilians who bear the brunt of the suffering being inflicted and who account for the vast majority of the casualties.

The primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies, of course, with the parties to a given conflict. There is, however, a crucial role to be played by **UN peacekeepers**. The protection of civilians caught up in war remains at the heart of what the UN does and what it stands for. As the statement delivered on behalf of the EU and its member States put it, the protection of civilians must be the benchmark against which we measure the success of UN peacekeeping operations.

More than anything else, it is the UN’s credibility on the ground which determines how successful it is going to be in protecting civilians. The sharp difference between the UN’s abject performance in Goma in November 2012 and the effective role played by MONUSCO in mid-2013 illustrates what we mean by credibility.

In his report of 22 November, the Secretary-General urges member states to ensure that their peacekeepers are given the pre-deployment training they need in relation to the protection of civilians according to UN standards; and that important resources such as air mobility assets and early warning are provided along with troops. For the UN to be credible in protecting civilians, troops deploying to difficult theatres to execute challenging mandates must be not only able, but also willing, to perform their task.

We have seen the difference made by 3,000 well-equipped South African, Tanzanian and Malawian troops in MONUSCO’s Force Intervention Brigade. To complement the deployments of traditional large TCCs, the Secretariat should make a concerted effort to broaden the base of troop contributors. And the Security Council and the Secretariat should work to enhance interaction with all troop contributors, in accordance with Presidential Note 630 of last October.

The Netherlands’ deployment to MINUSMA in Mali, including its focus on improving intelligence capabilities, is a welcome development. It could conceivably point towards greater engagement in UN peace operations in future by European and other troop contributors, particularly in the context of the ISAF drawdown in Afghanistan. Better intelligence, and intelligence-based and intelligence-driven operations, will ensure a more

effective and more credible role for UN peacekeepers in given conflict situations. It will also make a direct contribution to the protection of civilians.

This year we are marking the twentieth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. It is also fifteen years since the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1265. During this period we have seen a number of positive developments relating to the role of UN peacekeepers in protecting civilians. These include the increased integration of protection of civilians into the mandates for UN peacekeeping missions; improvements in the capacity of these missions (including the establishment of women's protection advisors and of mobile human rights teams); and the increased role played by regional organizations in relation to preventing and limiting violations of international humanitarian law. But significant challenges remain. There has been an alarming growth in the incidence and scale of intra-state conflicts, which are responsible for rising civilian casualties and where we are also seeing – as in South Sudan at present -- the increased targeting of peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel.

My delegation welcomes the inclusion of protection of civilians in Security Council resolutions. We would like, furthermore, to see the capacity of UN peacekeeping missions strengthened through standardised in-mission training, through the development of protection of civilians mission strategies and through resources being made available which would permit a greater focus on prevention and early warning analysis.

Madame President,

Small arms are the weapons of choice in many of today's conflicts. As a strong supporter of the **Arms Trade Treaty**, Ireland looks forward to the early entry into force of ATT provisions which will help to stop destabilising flows of arms into conflict regions. We are also keenly aware of the excellent work being undertaken by the **UN Mine Action Service**, including the steps it is taking in Libya and elsewhere to secure and to demilitarise stockpiles of weapons and ammunition. If such work had been possible in the Central African Republic during the course of 2013, significant amounts of weaponry might have been kept out of the hands of militant groups, and lives of civilians would have been saved.

Madame President,

It is a truism that the most effective form of protection is prevention. And yet it remains the case that far too little emphasis is placed on **peacebuilding and prevention**.

UNMISS in South Sudan is on the whole a good example of the impact which a UN mission can have in mitigating the risks to a local population. Yet there are also clear lessons to be learned from recent events there. In South Sudan, and other fragile or post-conflict societies, the need to build sustained and resilient peace, including through efforts towards reconciliation, has never been more apparent.

Under-Secretary-General Feltman underlined this at a recent Security Council debate, acknowledging that there had been insufficient reflection by the UN on "*our ability to repair trust in societies and foster genuine reconciliation*". To break a long cycle of insecurity or conflict in certain countries, this imbalance must now be addressed. And an important step in this regard will be to strengthen the participation of women in peacebuilding; this is a vital dimension to which the Secretary General's Special Envoy, Mary Robinson, has consistently drawn attention in the ground-breaking work she is doing in the Great Lakes region

Finally, no case demonstrates the need for more effective protection of civilians than **Syria**, where more than three million people remain trapped in areas of heavy fighting which continue to be besieged by government or opposition forces. Under-Secretary-General Amos has spoken frequently and eloquently of the humanitarian plight of ordinary Syrian men, women and children. While the regime bears the primary responsibility for the conflict, both the authorities and armed opposition groups must take immediate action to uphold international humanitarian law and to facilitate the safe and unhindered delivery of assistance to those who so urgently need it.

Thank you, Madame President.