



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



18 June 2007 No. 1

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Expected Council Action

The Council will hold an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on 22 June, following a briefing by the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes.

It is general practice for the Council to hold two debates on the protection of civilians per year, in June and December. Following recommendations from the Secretary-General in his 26 November 2002 report, the Council recognised the value of a public focus on this issue by the Council every six months in a presidential statement on 20 December 2002.

The Council is not expected at this stage to be considering proposals to further expand the substantive content of this thematic issue. However, the next report from the Secretary-General is due in October and preparation for this could precipitate ideas about new approaches.

Likely Themes

It seems likely that the June briefing may be focusing on four different aspects:

- deliberate targeting of civilians in conflicts, as in Iraq with terrorist bombings, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (with the primary aim of destroying communities, for example, through the use of sexual violence), is likely to be highlighted.
- indiscriminate use of force where the distinction between civilians and combatants is not always respected;
- forced displacement of civilians (especially in Uganda, Chad and the Central African Republic) with an emphasis on the fundamental right of return; and
- the safety and access of humanitarian personnel to civilians in conflict areas, perhaps with a focus on the recent developments in Sri Lanka, Darfur and in Lebanon and the Central African Republic where humanitarian workers were killed recently.

Key Recent Developments

The last time the Council addressed the protection of civilians was on 4 December 2006, when the Council held an open debate following a briefing by the then Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland. Egeland reported that overall progress was being made in implementing protection for civilians in armed conflict. He noted, however, that non-state actors were less respectful of civilian populations than ever. He qualified the abuses of civilians as crimes against humanity and war crimes, which, "in certain cases, amount[ing] to genocide".

Finally, he stressed that the responsibility to protect was a core principle of humanity which should be depoliticised and translated into joint action by Council members and global organisations.

On 23 December, the Council adopted resolution 1738 condemning intentional attacks against journalists and associated personnel, recalling that they must be considered as civilians and urging parties in a conflict to prevent abuses against journalists and to respect their professional independence and rights. In the case of deliberate targeting of civilians including journalists, the Council reiterated its readiness to take steps. Finally, the Council also condemned incitement to violence in the media and affirmed its determination to consider responses when authorising peacekeeping missions. The Council asked that the Secretary-General include as a sub-item in his next reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict the issue of the safety and security of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel.

Council Dynamics

In the absence of proposals for a specific outcome, the debate seems likely to provide a platform for certain Council members to begin testing the water and preparing the way for future proposals to further develop resolution 1674 late in the year. Council members supportive of developing this thematic norm (especially Belgium, France and the UK) seem to accept that it may be counter productive at this stage to re-open the debate on the responsibility to protect. Instead it is possible that they would want to focus more on general development and implementation of resolution 1674.

It seems that the role of peacekeeping operations in protecting civilian populations is of increasing interest for France and the UK.

UN Documents

Security Council Resolutions

- S/RES/1738 (23 December 2006) condemned intentional attacks against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel, and requested that the Secretary-General include as a sub-item in his next reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict the issue of the safety and security of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel.
- S/RES/1674 (28 April 2006) reaffirmed the responsibility to protect as formulated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document.
- S/RES/1296 (19 April 2000) emphasised the importance for humanitarian organisations to uphold the principles of neutrality and humanity in their humanitarian activities.
- S/RES/1265 (17 September 1999) expressed the Council's willingness to take measures to protect civilians in armed conflict and to consider how peacekeeping mandates might better address the negative impact of conflict on civilians.

Secretary-General's Report

- S/2005/740 (28 November 2005) recommended the Council adopt a new resolution to reflect the new challenges to the protection of civilians.

Presidential Statements

- S/PRST/2005/25 (21 June 2005) expressed the Council's concern about limited progress on the ground to ensure the effective protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict.
- S/PRST/2002/41 (20 December 2002) recognised the value of a public focus by the Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict every six months.