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## Security Council focuses on efforts to spare civilians from effects of war



Civilians escaping the combat zone in northeast Sri Lanka [File Photo]

22 November 2010 – The Security Council today once again called on parties to conflict to take steps to protect civilians affected by hostilities, demanding that they put an end to practices such as sexual violence, forced recruitment and other violations of international humanitarian law.

In a presidential statement adopted during its [debate](#) on the issue, the Security Council noted with concern the humanitarian impact of conflict, and called on parties to armed conflict “to give protection to the civilian population in accordance with applicable international humanitarian law.”

The 15-member body also reaffirmed that parties to armed conflict bear the primary responsibility to take all feasible steps to ensure the protection of affected civilians.

In his latest [report](#) to the Council on the issue, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon emphasized the need to make a “tangible” difference in the lives of the hundreds of thousands of civilians – men, women and children – who confront the horrors of war on a daily basis.

“The unstinting and rigorous attention of the Security Council to their situation remains vital and must be at the centre of its deliberations and actions. This is particularly the case in the many protracted violent crises and conflicts that persistently pose unacceptable levels of risk to civilians, with little prospect of peaceful resolution in the near future,” he wrote.

Mr. Ban noted that armed groups often employ strategies that flagrantly violate international law, ranging from deliberate attacks against civilians, including sexual violence, to attacks on civilian objects such as schools, to abduction, forced recruitment and using civilians to shield military objectives.

Fundamental to enhancing compliance, he stated, is the need to enhance accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, both for parties to conflict and individual perpetrators.

“In many conflicts it is to a large degree the absence of accountability, and, worse still, the lack in many instances of any expectation thereof, that allow violations to thrive,” he wrote.

The Secretary-General cited the need to do more to meet the five core challenges to ensuring more effective protection for civilians – enhancing compliance by parties to conflict with international law, enhancing compliance by non-State armed groups, enhancing protection by UN peacekeeping and other relevant missions, enhancing humanitarian access and enhancing accountability for violations of the law.

Several senior UN officials echoed Mr. Ban’s call for boosting accountability and for strengthening monitoring of measures already employed by the Council and other bodies to safeguard those at risk.

UN peacekeeping chief Alain Le Roy said that peacekeeping missions must exert every effort to protect civilians, using all their available capacities. “Yet we must recognize and communicate that peacekeeping operations cannot protect all civilians at all times, especially when they are deployed in very vast areas, amidst ongoing conflict,” he told the Council.

“Both the international community and those whom we endeavour to protect must understand that peacekeeping operations cannot be regarded as a substitute for state authority.

“In the final analysis, the protection of civilians will depend on stable and legitimate state institutions. Peacekeeping operations can augment their capacities and help to build them, but cannot, and should not, replace them,” he stated.

Valerie Amos, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, stressed the need to ensure a comprehensive, consistent and accountable approach to ensure better protection for civilians.

“Systematic monitoring and reporting on the impact of our efforts to improve the protection of civilians is essential. We need to assess and report on the extent to which our actions are making civilians safer,” she stated.

UN human rights chief Navi Pillay noted that the primary task is to prevent the commission of violations. “Where prevention fails, we collectively bear the responsibility to ensure accountability,” she added. “Accountability is not only required to fulfil international legal obligations, it is also our best tool to prevent the recurrence of violations.”

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