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Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Swiss Statement

presented by
H.E. Mr. Paul Seger
Permanent Representative

Permanent Mission of Switzerland
to the United Nations

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Mr President,

I would like to thank you for organizing this open debate on the Protection of Civilians. Switzerland welcomes the assertive manner in which the Council has addressed situations of concerns over the recent months. In particular, I would like to underline the importance of timely and concerted action by the Council, using the whole range of tools that the international community can apply in the case of widespread violence against civilians, including applying deterrent measures such as the freeze of assets, travel bans and ICC referrals early on.

The Council needs to ensure that actions to protect civilians are consistent, coherent and non-selective to ensure its political sustainability in the long run. Switzerland therefore invites the Council, as a way forward, to reinforce the attention devoted to situations that are not formally on its agenda, as recommended in paragraphs 102 and 103 of the report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians of November 2010. The momentum created by recent decisions in the Council may be lost if situations that are equally important as Libya and Côte d'Ivoire are not addressed. Failing to do so may lead to the perception of the whole concept of protection of civilians as purely utilitarian. This may further endanger civilians, as well as the actors carrying out protection tasks in the field.

Among the various situations which would merit the Council's attention Switzerland is very concerned about threats to civilians in Syria and firmly condemns human rights violations that have taken place there. We are concerned by the behavior of security forces towards non-violent protesters and civilians who do not participate in the protests. We must also remain vigilant that highly visible situations do not cause us to lose sight of other, long term, protection tasks. Humanitarian access remains difficult in numerous contexts, including in regions that are not usually at the center of the Council's attention.

Mr President,

Switzerland appreciates the fact that the United Nations in general and the Security Council in particular is addressing another aspect of the protection of civilians more systematically, which is the duty to investigate allegations of violations of IHL or human rights and to hold persons accountable for breaches of these rules. The recent referrals of situations to the ICC are striking examples of this positive trend. In this regard, Switzerland also stresses the importance of the report of the Panel of Experts on Sri Lanka mandated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Finally, Switzerland invites the Council to enhance its efforts in order approach the protection of civilians in a more systematic and coordinated manner taking into account the situation of children and women. We therefore appreciate the fact that consultations on how to foster such synergies were held under Brazilian presidency of the Council in February of this year. We encourage further discussions on this issue and call on members of the Council to be as inclusive as possible.

Thank you.