

**UN Security Council  
Open Debate**

**Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict**

**INDIA STATEMENT**

**By**

**Ambassador K. Nagaraj Naidu  
Deputy Permanent Representative**

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Mr. President,

We thank the delegation of Indonesia for organizing this Open Debate. We also thank the Secretary-General and other briefers for their remarks.

2. It is our impression that there is no dearth of intent to better the protection of civilians in armed conflict situations. However, it is obvious that the implementation of this concept is not matching the expectations. We need to translate the concept into feasible actions and operational responses.

3. The well-established norms to limit the effects of the conflict include respecting international humanitarian law and other relevant human rights laws by all parties to the conflict; ensuring safe and unhindered access for medical and humanitarian agencies to assist people. Today's challenges are not because of the absence of norms, but because of the inability to abide by the established norms.

Mr. President,

4. Protection of civilians is a vast subject and in view of the time constraints, I would like to limit my remarks to the application of this concept in the context of UN peacekeeping missions, which are mandated by the Security Council.

5. It is our experience that peacekeepers often rise to the occasion when required. Let me recall the example of Capt. Salaria who led an Indian Infantry Brigade Group as part of United Nations Operation in the Congo in November 1961. This Mission whose objective was to restore the peace and unity of Congo and to protect the lives of the civilian population in Elizabethville resulted in the maximum number of casualties suffered by India in any UN operation – 39 personnel laid down their lives. This was at a time when ‘Protection of Civilians’ was not part of peacekeeping mandate.

6. Protection of civilians in the context of UN peacekeeping operations has been a complex one because of the vastly different nature of armed conflicts; possible contradiction with the longstanding agreed principles of UN peacekeeping; as also the limitations of the mandates; and the serious inadequacy of the resources made available for peacekeeping missions.

7. While the issue continues to be debated in the Security Council, which has already adopted several resolutions and other documents, focused on this concept, these efforts have however, not really helped in addressing the main challenges.

8. The difficulties involved in achieving the aims of protection of civilians are well-known.

9. The general tendency is to wrongly assume that protection of civilians is the responsibility of the parties to the conflict, peacekeepers, and humanitarian organisations. However, this responsibility primarily rests with the national governments. Yet, very little is done in terms of strengthening the national and societal capacities of protection. Outside agencies can only supplement and not supplant the responsibility of national governments.

Mr. President,

10. The Secretary-General’s latest report clearly identifies that mandating of certain peacekeeping missions to participate in or conduct military operations against armed groups, or to otherwise conduct joint operations with non-UN forces in specific contexts, has generated important challenges for the performance of other mandated activities, including the protection of civilians. This also risks the credibility and the image of the United Nations neutral presence in armed conflict situations.

11. While 8 of the current 14 UN peacekeeping missions include protection of civilians as one of their mandates, this aspect is only one of the many other mandated components, at least 10 on an average, that each of these missions is individually expected to fulfill. It is clear that the expectations that the UN peacekeepers can effectively ensure protection of civilians in the absence of clear mandates are not realistic.

Mr. President,

12. Conflicts where peacekeeping operations are deployed are inherently messy, complex and difficult. However, these should not be taken as an excuse to accept the devastating impact of conflict on civilians.

13. A number of courses of action and mechanisms and processes are available to address the operational issues. It is up to the Council to harness these in a collaborative effort.

14. The commitments under Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) provide a foundation to tackle some of the challenges and further strengthen the protective role of peacekeepers. This requires a collective endeavour, including Member States and the Secretariat, to adapt to changing environments.

15. It is also useful to consider evolving a normative architecture for protection of civilians as part of a broader endeavor. A framework that is politically attuned, but not politicized or seen as being instrumentalized. It is only then can we move forward with cohesion to address issues that have exacted a heavy price of civilian lives.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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