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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE AL CONSIGLIO DI SICUREZZA DELL'ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE SULLA PROTEZIONE DEI CIVILI NEI CONFLITTI ARMATI

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'O.N.U., S.E. l'Arcivescovo Celestino Migliore, ha pronunciato il 14 gennaio a New York al Consiglio di Sicurezza dell'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite sul tema: "Open debate on protection of civilians in armed conflicts":

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. CELESTINO MIGLIORE

Mr. President,

The Security Council has been dealing with the topic of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts for more than ten years. Yet civilian security during conflict is becoming more and more critical, if not at times dramatic, as we have been witnessing in these past months, weeks and days in the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name just a few.

The year 2009 marks, among other things, the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Inasmuch as the protection of civilians stems from the norms set out in these Conventions and subsequent Protocols, my delegation trusts that this new year will also provide an occasion for assessment of the parties' commitment to ensure protection of civilians through greater respect for the rules of international humanitarian law.

The *2003 update of the aide-memoire to the Ten-Point Platform on the Protection of Civilians* is an important tool for clarifying responsibilities, enhancing cooperation, facilitating implementation and further strengthening coordination within the United Nations system and remains today more than ever an indispensable road map to bring protection to civilians entrapped in armed conflicts. Its 10 action points are a challenge to the international community and especially to the Security Council requesting a prompt, decisive and action-efficient answer. While all of the points are important, humanitarian access, special protection of children and women and disarmament continue to be three vital pillars for providing greater protection to civilians.

The overwhelming mistreatment of civilians in too many parts of the world does not seem to be just a side effect

of war. We continue to see civilians deliberately targeted as a means for achieving political or military gains. In the past few days we have witnessed a practical failure, from every side, to respect the distinction of civilians from military targets. It is sadly clear that political and military designs supersede basic respect for the dignity and rights of persons and communities, when methods or armaments are used without taking all reasonable measures to avoid civilians; when women and children are used as a shield for combatants; when humanitarian access is denied in the Gaza Strip; when people are displaced and villages destroyed in Darfur and when we see sexual violence devastating the lives of women and children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In such a context, protection of civilians requires not only a renewed commitment to humanitarian law, but demands first and foremost good political will and action. Protection of civilians must be based on a widespread responsible exercise of leadership. This requires leaders to exercise the right to defend their own citizens or the right to self-determination by resorting only to legitimate means; and it requires them to fully recognize their responsibility toward the international community and respect other States and communities' right to exist and coexist in peace. The broad spectrum of mechanisms the UN is putting in place to ensure the protection of civilians will be successful if, at the very least, it is able to foster a culture of responsible exercise of leadership among its members and holds them and every party in a conflict accountable to such a responsibility towards individuals and communities.

The increasing burden of war casualties and consequences imposed on civilians comes also from the massive production, continued innovation and sophistication of armaments. The ever higher quality and availability of small arms and light weapons, as well as anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, tragically make the killing of human beings that much easier and more efficient. In this context, my delegation fully supports and encourages the objectives of the recent General Assembly resolution *Towards an Arms Trade Treaty*, which lays down the first important step toward a legally binding instrument on arms trade and transfers. Likewise, my delegation welcomes the adoption of the *Cluster Munitions Convention* and encourages countries to ratify this treaty as a matter of priority and a sign of their commitment to addressing civilian casualties.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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