

# Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict : @PKO Now!

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### Background to Protection of Civilians

With the collapse of the Cold War structure and the rise of internal conflicts, the United Nations security system has faced the challenge of how to protect civilians in warzones. In particular, UN peacekeeping missions in the early 1990s in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were recognized as "failures" for not being able to sufficiently protect civilians whose lives were at risk,<sup>1</sup> and as a result the protection of civilians in armed conflict became a major issue for the UN. Around this time the concept of "human security" was also under discussion, and in February 1999 through the initiative of the Canadian government, the United Nations Security Council ( UNSC ) took up the issue of the protection of civilians as an official agenda item.<sup>2</sup> Later, in September 1999, the UNSC adopted resolution 1265 ( UNSCR 1265 ) on the Protection of Civilians.

### UNSCR 1265 and Its Contents

UNSCR 1265 was significant because it acknowledged for the first time that civilians account for the vast majority of casualties in conflict. It showed particular concern for the damage inflicted on vulnerable groups such as women, children, refugees, and internally displaced persons, and recognized the consequent impact of this harm on durable peace, reconciliation, and development. In order to enhance the protection of civilians on a long-term basis, the resolution also stressed the need to address the causes of armed conflict in

a comprehensive manner, including by promoting economic growth, poverty eradication, sustainable development, national reconciliation, good governance, democracy, the rule of law and respect for and protection of human rights.

For the purpose of protecting civilians, UNSCR 1265 also stipulates the inclusion, in peace agreements and mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions, of specific and adequate measure for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants (OP. 12), as well as special protection and assistance provisions for women and children (OP.13). To this end, UNSCR 1265 also requested the Secretary-General, member states and relevant international and regional organizations to ensure that UN personnel involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace-building activities have appropriate training in international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, cultural awareness, and civilian-military coordination (OP.14). It also noted that small arms and light weapons as well as anti-personnel mines affect the safety of civilians (OP.17 and OP.18).

### **UNSCR 1265 and Its Evolvement**

After the adoption of UNSCR 1265, in October 2000, UNSC also unanimously adopted resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. This resolution is highly valued as a historic document that recognized the significance of the role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peace building, and the importance of the equal participation of women in promoting and maintaining peace and security. It also stressed the necessity of expanding the role of women in the process of conflict prevention and resolution.

With respect to children, in August 1999, UNSC adopted resolution 1261, which demonstrated grave concern about the impact of armed conflict on children and strongly condemned the employment of child soldiers. Since the adoption of UNSCR 1265 in 2000, UNSC resolutions on children and armed conflict have, while enforcing UNSCR 1261, stressed the relevance of the protection of civilians. In addition, on 25 May 2000 the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict was also adopted.

In parallel with these above-mentioned developments, on 22 October 1999, the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNASMIL), which was contained within UNSC resolution 1270, for the first time stipulated the protection of civilians. Since then, civilian protection has become an important task for UN peacekeeping operations and is indeed a part of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan ( UNMISS ) ( UNSCR 1996, 8 July 2011) to which personnel of the Japan Self Defense Force have also been dispatched.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Kofi A. Annan, We the People: The role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century, A/54/2000 (27 March 2000)

<sup>2</sup> S/PRST/1999/6 (12 February 1999)