Statement of Ambassador David Roet at UN Security Council Meeting on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

January 19, 2016

Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations

http://embassies.gov.il/un/statements/security\_council/Pages/Statement-on-Protection-of-Civilians-in-armed-conflict.aspx

​

Mr. President,

Let me start by quoting the commander of the UN force in Rwanda, Lt. Col. Roméo Dallaire, in his haunting account of the Rwandan Genocide: (and I quote)

The worst eyes that haunt me are the eyes of those people who were totally bewildered. They're looking at me with my blue beret and they're saying, "What in the hell happened? We were moving towards peace. You were there as the guarantor. How come I'm dying here?" Those eyes dominated and they're absolutely right. How come my mission failed?.”

Mr. President,

21 years have passed since the Rwandan Genocide. But the mission of protecting civilians remains a pressing challenge, and a primary responsibility of the international community.

Over the past decade, the number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance has tripled. The overwhelming majority of those people are civilians affected by armed conflict and other stressing emergencies.

Today, men and women in numerous places around the world are at risk. Civilians have become pawns in a game in which state and non-state actors use them to gain political leverage.

Attacks directed at civilians have become depressingly routine and we receive daily reports of new atrocities which shock the human conscience.

Mr. President,

Nowhere in the world is the situation more heartbreaking than in Syria. Assad’s murderous regime has been attacking and killing civilians by the hundreds of thousands.

Despite the fact that the Security Council has adopted numerous resolutions demanding that the Syrian government allow free access for UN humanitarian aid, attempts to deliver cross-border and cross-line humanitarian aid is being impeded because of the challenging security and operational environment. In the meantime, people continue to suffer.

We have all witnessed the struggle of the people of the Syrian town of Madaya, where 42,000 people have been taken hostage by Assad and his Hezbollah allies.

The town and its people are under siege, surrounded by barbed wire, land mines and snipers.

Left without basic access to food - men, women and children have been dying on a daily basis due to starvation and the harsh winter weather.

They find themselves resorting to eating household pets and making soup out of grass.

UNICEF’s representative to Syria described the situation on the ground, and I quote:

“The starvation here is no act of God -- not the result of drought or flooding or crop failure. This famine is man-made.

Let me state the obvious.

The use of starvation as a weapon of war is deplorable, and is a war crime.

The dire situation in Madaya, is an example that has captured public attention, but it is estimated that this is only a tenth of the number of those stranded in besieged or hard-to-reach areas as conditions grow steadily worse.

Mr. President,

Hezbollah, the enforcer of Iranian and Syrian orders, the recruiter of children to fight in Syria, is the prime organization terrorizing the people of Madaya.

This should not come as a surprise.

Terrorizing civilian populations is part of Hezbollah’s modus operandi. This is what they do. Israel has warned time and time again that letting Hezbollah’s actions go unchecked will only result in more death, pain and suffering.

Over the course of years, Hezbollah has been indiscriminately firing rockets towards heavily populated areas in Israel, while using the people of Southern Lebanon as human shields.

One example is The Southern Lebanese village of Muhayb, Hezbollah has moved military infrastructure into the village, and the villages in the surrounding area. Those villages, where innocent civilians go about their daily lives have been transformed to military bases. Who speaks for those people? Who protects these people from Hezbollah?

According to recent reports, the village, consisting of 90 houses in total, contains no less than nine arms depots, five rocket-launching sites, four infantry positions, three underground tunnels, three anti-tank positions and a command post.

Let me state the obvious again Mr. President.

Deliberately putting the lives of innocent civilians in harm’s way is a war crime.

Mr. President,

The threat to the lives of both Lebanese and Israeli civilian is rarely mentioned in this hall.

It is the responsibility of the Security Council to identify rising threats and to prevent situations such as these from escalating. The Security Council should send a clear message to Hezbollah and to Lebanon that this cannot be tolerated.

Mr. President,

The tactic of taking civilian populations hostage for political and military advantage has steadily become a primary method of waging war by states and non-state actors.

Protecting civilians under these circumstances, while holding non-state actors to their obligations under international Humanitarian Law is our biggest collective challenge.

Reviewing the HIPPO (High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations) report, we are encouraged that its authors recognize that protecting civilians is a core obligation of the United Nations.

In cases of imminent threat, the United Nations must rise to the challenge of protecting civilians.

Furthermore recognizing the linkage between a wider political approach and the UN’s responsibility to protect civilians will enable a realistic mandate with a possibility of implementation and plan of action.

Before concluding, I would like to pay tribute to the brave men and women peacekeepers, which lost their lives while serving in the most dangerous places on the globe.

And to those who continue to serve, let me reiterate Israel’s appreciation for their work that have had a life-changing impact on millions of people that are in dire need of protection.

Mr. President,

Next week the General Assembly will mark the international day of commemoration in memory of the victims of the holocaust. We know all too well the horrors that human kind is capable of. Promises have been made. But yet, the international community fails at too many junctures. We must fulfill what was promised 70 years ago – Never Again.

We must not allow dictators and terrorist organizations to dictate the rules of the game. Too many lives are at stake. This is the message the council should send today.

Thank you Mr. President.