



UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

799 UNITED NATIONS PLAZA
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017-3505

**Statement by Stephen Townley, Counselor for Legal Affairs
69th Session of the UN General Assembly Sixth Committee
Consideration of Effective Measures to Enhance the Protection, Security
and Safety of Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representatives**

Agenda Item 80

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The rules protecting the sanctity of ambassadors, other diplomats, and consular officials enable them to carry out their vital functions. Respect for these rules is a basic prerequisite for the normal conduct of relations among States.

Rules providing protections for diplomats have a long and deep history. Going as far back as to the activities of the College of Fetials in Rome, diplomatic envoys were considered inviolable. While at times the protections extended to such envoys were grounded in religious law, ultimately, they came to be part of the law of nations. These protections not only shielded diplomats from hostile actions by states but also imposed a duty on states to afford special protection to diplomats from harmful acts by non-state actors. Indeed, concern about the possible harm that private individuals might inflict on diplomats has been so deep that, to give just one example, during the early days of the United States, an incident involving an attack on a French diplomat prompted enactment of a number of the provisions in what ultimately became the First Judiciary Act.

While the rules are old and a common substantive core has characterized them, the facts and circumstances of attacks on diplomatic and consular officials have changed. Indeed, in recent years, such attacks have increased in number, more often involve non-state armed groups, and have become if anything more brazen. Just this summer, the United States temporarily relocated all of our personnel out of Libya due to the ongoing violence resulting from clashes between Libyan militias. Earlier, on February 1, 2013, the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, Turkey was attacked. And in April 2013, a U.S. Foreign Service officer – along with members of our military service -- was killed by an IED attack in Zabul Province, Afghanistan. These are just two of the over 200 attacks against U.S. diplomatic facilities and personnel in the last 10 years, which resulted in the deaths of over 40 personnel, including U.S. Ambassador to Libya Chris

Stevens and three other Americans in September 2012. Nor is the United States alone in this regard.

These brutal acts by armed groups should be universally condemned.

The Convention on Internationally Protected Persons was adopted by the General Assembly in 1973, and has 176 UN States parties. This Convention, which requires the punishment of violent attacks against foreign government officials, including diplomats and consular officials, also requires States Parties to prevent the commission of such crimes, including the exchanging of information and other coordination. Since 1980, the General Assembly has been adopting resolutions condemning acts of violence against diplomatic and consular missions and representatives. We look forward to discussion of another such resolution this year, to reemphasize the importance of these issues. But the 2012 resolution also stressed practical measures to prevent violence against diplomatic and consular missions and representatives. And, indeed, prevention is a critical element of the obligation of receiving states.

The steps that are appropriate to protect a mission, and that are therefore required of the receiving State, will depend on the potential threats to a particular mission in that State. Thus, as the facts and circumstances of attacks on diplomatic and consular personnel continue to change, so too must our preventive measures. For our part, we place an emphasis on enhanced security training and good personal security practices to help mitigate the risks our personnel face every day. But prevention is also facilitated by collaboration. Thus, our Embassies overseas often work with local law enforcement and other authorities to prepare for eventualities, for instance by conducting drills and sharing information when appropriate.

Mr. Chairman, all of us in this room have a personal stake in diplomatic protection. But the world also has a vital stake in the protection of diplomats, because diplomacy is the foundation of international relations. There are forces in this world that wish harm to diplomats. We all must stand united against them. And we can start by continuing to develop means to prevent violence before it occurs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

October 20, 2014