

23 March 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-level Briefing on “Broadening the Concept of
Peacekeeping: The Contribution of Civil Society to the Unarmed
Protection of Civilians”**

*Delivered on behalf of the President of the General Assembly by H.E. Ambassador Tariq Ali Al-Ansari,
Deputy Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly*

His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Ambassador Jan Grauls of Belgium,
Ambassador Jean-Francis Zinsou of Benin,
Ambassador Eduardo Ulibarri of Costa Rica,
Ambassador Libran Cabactulan of the Philippines,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser regrets that he could not join you today.

As his Deputy Chef de Cabinet, I am pleased to make the following remarks on his behalf.

Allow me at the outset to thank the co-hosts Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica and the Philippines, for inviting me to this very timely and important briefing.

Your courageous initiative is very much appreciated. The concept of unarmed protection of civilians was deliberated among Member States with different approaches, and it is timely that we come to this brain storming session to consider it.

In every stage of a conflict, it is civilians, especially women and children, who are the most vulnerable.

To protect them, we need to make sure that all available resources are engaged in a combined and well-coordinated effort.

We all understand that UN Peacekeeping mandates have become more complex.

And the protection of civilians is becoming more and more crucial to the work of our Missions.

In this regard, I commend the Secretary-General's and Member States' efforts to respond to this increased complexity.

In addition to the UN's efforts, we are witnessing the significant and increasing role of civil society organisations in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Ever more, we see civil society actors supporting - directly or indirectly - the UN's efforts to protect those in need.

Worldwide, many violent conflict situations arise that would greatly benefit from an early and deliberate engagement of unarmed civilians, to better guarantee the protection of civilians under threat.

This is where civil society organisations' work is increasingly relevant and useful.

It is only natural that civil society actors, who work closely with local stakeholders, have an intimate understanding of the situation on the ground.

Through their broad experience, civil society actors have developed and implemented innovative, local methods for protecting civilians, without relying on the use of force on the ground.

As past experiences have taught us, every conflict or dispute is distinct. Each one requires careful attention and the most appropriate tools.

But no single actor can do it alone.

Legitimacy, good governance, good coordination and reaffirming sovereignty, territorial integrity and national ownership are all interlinked elements to make the task a success.

In some cases, civil society organizations act in a more informal, timely and flexible way than State actors or international organizations. The cases of Libya and Syria are good examples. Territories under occupation also offer similar experiences.

This advantage is to be benefited from. The earlier the preventive action, the more cost-effective it is likely to be.

It is, therefore, a welcome and encouraging development that we are listening more closely and carefully to civil society, and taking into consideration their thoughts and approaches before making critical decisions.

For this reason, our briefing today is an important opportunity to explore how we can better profit from each other's capacities and experiences, while of course respecting the given mandates of relevant UN bodies in this regard.

It is also a chance to consider how we can more effectively manage our knowledge and coordinate our efforts on the issue of unarmed protection of civilians, in accordance with international law and the UN charter principles and objectives.

I hope that you will seize this opportunity for the benefit of all civilizations - men, women, and children - in need worldwide.

Before concluding, let me again express my appreciation to our co-hosts, Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica and the Philippines, for organizing this briefing.

I am convinced that today's discussion will greatly contribute to strengthening collaboration among civil society organizations and the UN peacekeeping community.

I wish you an interesting and thought-provoking briefing.

Thank you.