

## **The Minister for Development Cooperation Ulla Tørnæs At the International Seminar on Protection of Civilians – Learning from Darfur**

10 September 2007, Eigtveds Pakhus, Copenhagen

Ladies and gentlemen,

We, the international community, have a political and a moral responsibility to act when systematic attacks on civilians are taking place in armed conflicts. Therefore, I warmly welcome you to participate in this seminar on "Protection of Civilians – Learning from Darfur" which is organised jointly by DanChurchAid and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I believe, that today's debate will bring new awareness about the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The aim is to reveal different protection strategies, discuss what has worked - and what has not - and come up with new ideas on how we can do better.

In recent years the international community has shown an increasing commitment to the protection of civilians in conflict. The global framework for the protection of civilians is principally enshrined in international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is a concrete example of the commitment to end impunity for the most serious crimes, and thereby protect the rights of civilian populations affected by conflict. The responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity has been clearly stated in the 2005 UN Global Summit Declaration, in various Security Council Resolutions, and in regular reports to the Security Council by the Emergency Response Coordinator.

But, despite the expressed commitment to protect civilians, the impact of armed conflict has continued to disproportionately affect the civilian population - especially women and children. In his report on "protection of civilians in armed conflict" to the Security Council from 2005, the Secretary-General pointed to a changing nature of conflict. Today, the impact on civilians has a profound consequence for the respect for civilian status and the safety and well-being of civilian populations. Targeted attacks, forced displacement, sexual violence, forced conscription, indiscriminate killings, mutilation, hunger, disease and loss of livelihoods are collectively used as means of war. This new emerging warfare paints an extremely grim picture of the human costs of armed conflict.

The Secretary-General in his report states that "civilians are increasingly at risk of being caught in crossfires, targeted for reprisals, forcibly recruited, sexually enslaved or raped." The armed groups involved in these conflicts are often small and under-equipped. These armed groups tend to avoid major military engagement and instead target and spread fear among civilians. And today's conflicts increasingly rely upon child soldiers, who are commonly recruited and used against their will. The report also brings the attention to the fact that sexual violence, particularly against women and girls, frequently is used as a deliberate method of warfare - using rape as a weapon.

Today's seminar takes outset in the conflict in Darfur. The conflict has led to tremendous suffering by the civilian population. In Darfur, thousands of civilians have been killed, raped or wounded. Over two million people are displaced, and two thirds of the population is dependent on international aid for food and basic needs. These are stark statistics. And the UN has described the situation in Darfur as one of the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today. The civilian population in Darfur has been subjected to forced displacement on an unprecedented scale, as well as widespread physical and sexual violence. Hence, the conflict in Darfur was the first emergency to be characterised as a "protection crisis".

But why has it proved so difficult to turn the international commitments on the responsibility to protect civilians into practice – in Darfur and in other armed conflicts around the world? How can we learn from experiences of implementing different protection strategies, and what can we do to improve protection on the ground?

The Secretary-General's report on protection of civilians describes four steps for further action. I agree, that these steps are very central to our efforts to respond to the protection needs of civilians in armed conflict. The first step is "Physical protection". He talks about the responsibility of the State, non-State actors and the international community. And he emphasizes the important role played by peacekeeping missions and regional and intergovernmental organizations. The second step is about "Provision of humanitarian assistance". The changing nature of armed conflict raises the need to employ new humanitarian skills and resources to respond to the protection challenge. The third step is "Peacemaking" underscoring the importance of political solutions. And how the protection rights and well-being of civilians affected by armed conflict need to be addressed in order to sustain the peace process. The final and fourth step is "Monitoring and Reporting". There is a need for more consistent and accurate reporting on both trends and issues of concern relating to the protection of civilians. And he recommends that a systematic data-collection mechanism should be put in place.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to share with you, examples of some of the efforts Denmark has undertaken to support the protection of civilians. The partnerships we have engaged in. And the strategic priorities we have focused on.

Denmark works actively to promote respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. Only by establishing and enforcing the international legal framework can we ensure the safety, dignity and integrity of civilian populations affected by conflict, as well as accountability of those who commit atrocities against them. To us, the establishment of the International Criminal Court was an important affirmation of the global commitment to protect civilians.

Denmark has a long standing partnership with a number of UN humanitarian agencies and international organisations with a protection mandate such as UNHCR, UNICEF, OCHA and ICRC, as well as Danish NGO's working on protection - such as the Danish Refugee Council and the Danish Red Cross. These organisations all make important contributions to the security and safety of civilian populations affected by war by implementing different protection strategies – both inside and outside the camps.

The protection and assistance needs of refugees and internally displaced people are a key priority issue to Denmark. Especially, the internally displaced people have long been underserved by the international community. While refugee numbers are declining on a global scale, the number of conflict-generated IDP's remains exceptionally high at over 20 million people. Therefore, we welcome the positive efforts that have been made to strengthen the UN system's response to IDP's. And Denmark will continue to work for the improvement of the international guidelines for the internally displaced as well as improved assistance for this group.

Denmark's Regions of Origin Initiative targets refugees and internally displaced persons residing in poor areas in and around conflict-ridden countries. Over the years, large groups of refugees and IDP's have placed a great strain on the societies that give them shelter. Both those fleeing and the local inhabitants are among the poorest of the poor in the developing countries. Social tensions and a deteriorated security situation are often the result of a shortage of resources. In places where the armed conflicts have ended, the return of displaced people is often fraught with major difficulties, since the old conflicts can continue to prevail.

Protection of women, children and groups with specific needs is a high priority for Denmark. In particular, measures to prevent and respond effectively to sexual and gender based violence. Security council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security is important in this endeavour. The resolution directly addresses the need to protect women and girls from gender based violence in and after conflict situations. In supporting the implementation of the resolution, Denmark was one of the first countries to formulate an action plan on women, peace and security. As a member of the Security Council in 2006, Denmark worked for the inclusion of references to women, peace and security in various Security Council Resolutions. An example is Resolution 1590 on Sudan, where the need to protect women and girls from violence and sexual abuse was mentioned specifically.

During my visit to Darfur in January I met a woman who had been raped several times. Her story was heartbreaking. In spite of her suffering she had to carry on in order to survive. Including leaving the camp every day to collect firewood and risk being raped again. So far it has not been possible to avoid the systematic targeting of women. Sexual violence against women has been a particularly brutal feature of the conflict.

Combating gender based violence in Darfur must be made a priority and I am pleased that resolution 1769 reaffirms the commitments of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. A key priority for the hybrid force must be to bring an end to rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls. At the same time we need to assist women in influencing the peace.

When I visited Darfur in January the situation looked very dire. Humanitarian access was a major issue and the conditions for the organisations on the ground were very difficult. Resolution 1706 had been rejected by Khartoum and there was no political solution in sight. I know the situation on the ground remains very difficult, but at the same time I am pleased that over this summer we have seen some positive developments at the political level. The acceptance by the Government of Sudan of a hybrid-force into Darfur, and the following adoption of Security Council Resolution 1769 on 31st July, give us hope that conditions for offering protection will improve. Obviously, we need to see the resolution implemented, but I am moderately optimistic. Partly because of the overwhelming response, there has been to the UN call for troops to UNAMID.

Denmark has made a substantial offer to the UN, including up to 220 personnel, aircraft and logistical elements. We fully respect and support that the force should be predominantly African and our contribution is put forward to allow the UN to at the same time put together the most efficient force. It is crucial to get the force that will be best suited to offer the protection of the civilians that is so desperately needed.

In other areas we have seen some progress. It is positive that peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the rebels will resume on 27 October. The meeting held in Arusha in early August with UN Special Representative Jan Eliasson – although it didn't bring together all the rebel leaders – signalled a willingness to restart the political progress. This is, of course, extremely important because without a political solution we cannot secure peace in the long term. I sincerely hope that all parties to the conflict will support this process.

I appreciate that the theme today is protection in situations of armed conflict, but I will also look a bit forward. When the time is right we must be prepared to swiftly assist with the reconstruction efforts in Darfur. Again, in order to secure long-term peace and stability we need to make sure that the people of Darfur have sustainable livelihoods, and that basic services – water, health, education etc. – can be provided. We need to consider this already when we plan the humanitarian interventions and in the important phase of transition.

Last year, Denmark set a side 200 million Danish Kroner for assistance to Darfur. Half of it to be spent on humanitarian interventions, and the other half for reconstruction. Sadly, the first half was too easy to disburse. The needs are overwhelming. The second half - the reconstruction part - on the other hand, is much more of a challenge. The security situation has of yet not really allowed for reconstruction efforts. Having said that, let me mention that we have contributed to construction and maintenance of AMIS police stations. The need for reliable and accountable police forces is evident when we talk about protection. We are hopeful now that the situation will change and allow us to support the reconstruction efforts. Such undertaking also needs to be planned and carried out in cooperation

with local stakeholders, which is extremely difficult when the region is in a state of armed conflict. The Darfur Joint Assessment Mission must finally be completed and we will make sure that our contribution is in line with the finding of that mission.

In order to build the capacity of regional organisations in Africa, we are supporting the African Union. By supporting the regional organisations we enable them to deal with conflicts in their own region. In my view, it is very important to build this regional capacity. And in Darfur and other conflicts on the African continent, the AU plays a key role.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I pointed out before, despite great international commitment, the success in implementing strategies to protect civilians in armed conflict has regrettably been limited. It is my hope that this seminar will contribute to shed some more light on where the problems lie, and what to do about it. We may not come up with a lot of answers – but today's discussions may help to narrow down the questions. And by exchanging practical experiences from the ground, we can share examples of what has worked. As well as share experiences of what has not worked – which is equally important if our aim is to point at ways of improving protection strategies. Finally, by bringing together participants with different backgrounds and different approaches to protection – from the African Union, the military, the police, the UN, humanitarian organisations, International organisations, International and local NGO's, research institutions and academics – we have a unique opportunity to create new partnerships.

By these words I warmly welcome you all and wish for a fruitful and constructive debate. Thank you!