



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

8953rd meeting

Tuesday, 25 January 2022, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Ms. Syed (Norway)

Members:

Albania	Mrs. Peçi
Brazil	Ms. De Souza Schmitz
China	Mr. Tian Bingxu
France	Ms. Lebatteux
Gabon	Mr. Nanga
Ghana	Mr. Boateng
India	Mr. Setia/Mr. Ravindran
Ireland	Mr. Gallagher
Kenya	Mr. Kariuki
Mexico	Mr. Ochoa Martínez
Russian Federation	Mr. Leonidchenko
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Mudrick
United States of America	Mr. Pine

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

War in cities: protection of civilians in urban settings

Letter dated 10 January 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/23)

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of Security Council members dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this official record of the Security Council will be supplemented by a compilation of annexes (S/2022/54) containing the statements submitted by interested non-members of the Council.

22-23972 (E)



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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after four minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rae (Canada) *(spoke in French)*: I thank the Government of Norway for its efforts to put the protection of civilians at the centre of its presidency of the Security Council.

(spoke in English)

Given the global situation today, this is not a theoretical discussion. We all know that real lives are at stake. When we look at the remnants of large parts of historical cities and areas of conflict around the world, we see decimated landscapes that are reminiscent of the Second World War: destroyed buildings, unexploded ordinance and mountains of debris as far as the eye can see.

Those cities were once thriving centres with markets, schools, places of worship, hospitals and small businesses. Those examples must not be repeated or added to.

Our first obligation as Member States is to respect the Charter of the United Nations and avoid aggression. I would remind everyone of what it says in Article 2, paragraph 4:

“All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”

Thirty years after the Second World War and the signing of the Charter, the world negotiated the first Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions. The modern principle of distinction — that parties to armed conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants, between civilian objects and military objectives — was finally written into treaty form, along with the principles of proportionality and precautions in attack.

Today those principles form the undisputed basis of international humanitarian law governing the conduct of hostilities in all armed conflicts.

(spoke in French)

For States that are willing to conform, what should be done is clear: international humanitarian law treaties should be ratified, adopted as national law and integrated into military doctrine, training, operational decision-making and disciplinary procedures.

(spoke in English)

All of us have an obligation to understand the consequences of our actions. The urban environment is complex and the precautions that international humanitarian law requires include an understanding of the foreseeable effects of attacks — who will die, who will be displaced, whose homes will be destroyed and whose health will be affected for all time.

We have to take into account the different roles of men, women, boys and girls and their communities and how that impacts their likelihood of being injured or killed or exposed to sexual and gender-based violence. It is critical for all parties to armed conflict to understand the specific protection needs and priorities of women and girls.

Where a State or an armed group flouts the law, we have to go beyond ritual condemnation and take action. For the past 20 years, we have seen that happen less frequently because the Security Council is too often obstructed by the veto. Since 2011, it has been blocked 16 times from taking urgently needed action on Syria, including to address some of the most pressing humanitarian aspects of the civil war.

It is incumbent upon all States Members of the United Nations to challenge the Security Council when its will is blocked by the veto and pressure it to achieve its mandate or find alter-native avenues of collective address within the Charter of the United Nations.

To sum up, the first obligation for all Member States, the Secretary-General and the Secretariat is to prevent armed conflict and aggression from taking place. We also owe it to those who have been killed and maimed and displaced by unlawful attacks to take every practical measure to ensure that parties to armed conflict abide by the law. And yes, international humanitarian law is the law. Collectively we actually have the means to do so. The question is: do we have the will?

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I would like to begin by thanking Norway for convening this important meeting. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the President of the Inter-national Committee of the Red Cross and others for their briefings.

As a staunch supporter of the concept of human security, Japan attaches great importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, especially in urban settings. Urban warfare kills, injures and displaces a significant number of civilians, destroys critical civilian infrastructure and disrupts essential services. Explosive remnants of war hinder the reconstruction of cities and prevent the return of displaced persons, the return to school and the recovery of livelihoods. The Security Council and Member States must take concrete actions to prevent and mitigate such tragic impacts of war in cities.

In that context, Japan joined the statement of the Group of Friends on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Japan reiterates that international humanitarian law provides a robust legal basis for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including in cities.

In the same vein, Japan co-sponsored resolution 2573 (2021), on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, and echoes the grave concern about indiscriminate attacks and the establishment of military positions in densely populated areas, as well as their devastating impacts on civilians.

Japan is actively engaged in operational activities to help civilians affected by armed conflict, particularly in urban settings. For example, Japan has long supported the people in Gaza, including by contributing to the conflict preparedness and protection project of the Mine Action Service (UNMAS), which substantially reduced casualties due to explosive ordnance through extensive risk education. Japan is also starting to support the UNMAS explosive risk reduction project in Ethiopia.

Japan is determined to continue to make every effort for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We will continue to work closely with other Member States, the United Nations system, international humanitarian organizations and civil society organizations to contribute to that endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Last week I had the opportunity to contribute to the Security Council open debate on women and peace and security (see S/PV.8949). In addition, I closely followed the debate on the Middle East and the briefing on Colombia. January has been a busy month for the Council, and I wish to express my appreciation to Norway for the inclusive manner in which it has conducted its presidency. Today's open debate is vital to the core objective of this Organization, which is the protection of human beings, their well-being and peace.

This year is also central to efforts to advance the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex), adopted at the Conference on Sustainable Urban Development, Habitat III, in Quito, Ecuador, which recognizes the humanitarian impact of war on urban areas. In its paragraph 30 we acknowledged the need for Governments and civil society to further support the provision of resilient urban services during armed conflict, as well as the need to reaffirm full respect for international humanitarian law.

The equation is simple, yet regrettable: war and armed violence are an obstacle to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All, we committed to supporting a shift from a reactive to a proactive approach, investing in and building resilience, while ensuring effective responses to address the immediate needs of people affected by armed conflict. We also agreed to give special attention to countries in situations of conflict and post-conflict countries, as well as countries under foreign occupation.

I am grateful for this morning's briefings. My country shares the briefers' concern regarding the increased suffering in conflict areas, as also reflected in the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423).

The violence, threats and attacks that health-care workers continue to suffer, even six years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), are unacceptable. Ecuador rejects and condemns the continuing attacks on health services and schools. We also condemn and reject the use of cyberspace to destroy or affect critical infrastructure.

The Organization and all its entities, including the Security Council in particular, must rise to the challenge of protecting the civilian population and the assets indispensable to their survival. That is why Ecuador co-sponsored resolution 2573 (2021). The Council must strengthen the Organization's efforts against the use of explosives in populated areas. On this occasion, we emphasize our condemnation of the use of such weapons, as well as our commitment to continuing to support the efforts of the United Nations, the Inter-national Committee of the Red Cross and civil society to promote the effective implementation of international humanitarian law and alleviate the impact and suffering caused by conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Keçeli (Turkey): We thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate and for bringing an international focus to war in cities.

Urban warfare is not a new phenomenon. The United Nations itself was created following the destruction of cities around the world. Yet history repeats itself with devastating consequences. Parties to conflict continue to perpetrate attacks that target civilians and destroy civilian infrastructure.

My country hosts approximately 4 million Syrian refugees, many of whom fled from cities that were targeted by the regime. When they return in the future, they will do so knowing that life will never be the same. The Syrian regime and its backers continue to target the civilian infrastructure in cities.

Most recently, the Arşani water distribution and pumping station close to central Idlib was hit. That deliberate attack impacted almost 250,000 Syrians. Such violations add to the gravity of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) terrorist organization also targets civilians and civilian infrastructure in northern Syria, where only last year more than 350 civilians lost their lives in such attacks. It is now a matter of common knowledge that the PKK/YPG release Da'esh members from the camps in north-eastern Syria in exchange for financial gain or for committing terrorist acts. The terrorist organization also targets hospitals and medical centres, continues to recruit children and prevents

the civilian population, including Syrian Kurds and Yazidis, from returning to their homes.

The lack of accountability signifies our collective failure to prevent violations from occurring and, indeed, reoccurring. We must act now to establish and support the existing accountability mechanisms in order to end impunity.

The Security Council formally recognized the protection of civilians in armed conflict as a matter of international peace and security in 1999. Since then, more than 20 years have passed, which has provided enough space to create the necessary tools to enhance that agenda. Yet the internal dynamics and decisions of the Council have reduced the role of the United Nations to aftermath intervention.

We need a unified position from the Security Council. We expect the Council to uphold its responsibility in order to prevent and ease suffering around the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Skoog: I thank Norway for convening this important debate. I am pleased to address the Security Council on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

As many densely populated cities have become the primary battleground for armed conflicts, protecting civilians in the face of urban warfare remains a critical challenge. The humanitarian consequences of hostilities in urban areas are direct and indirect, immediate and long-term, invisible and visible. On numerous occasions, the Security Council has addressed the protection of civilians, as well as infrastructure and essential services, including the protection of education, yet the situation on the ground remains deeply worrying. Against that backdrop, the European Union welcomes the discussion about the ways in which contemporary urban conflicts are fought, the devastating humanitarian consequences they cause, and the actions needed to improve the protection of civilians.

The responsibility to protect civilians lies, first and foremost, with those fighting wars. In that respect, the EU calls on parties to conflicts to ensure that they comply with international humanitarian law, with due respect for the specific challenges that urban contexts pose to civilians and civilian infrastructure. The EU is also deeply concerned about the challenges associated with the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, including near hospitals, schools or universities, or along routes to or from them, and their impact on civilians. In that regard, we thank Ireland for the transparent and inclusive consultation process on protecting civilians in urban warfare, which is aimed at developing a political declaration to address humanitarian harm. The international community also must take a more outspoken stance in calling on all parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law, including by condemning violations of international humanitarian law, finding political and practical solutions to protect civilians and objects that are vital to civilian populations, guaranteeing that services are maintained or restored, ending the military use of schools when unlawful, and ensuring accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses in order to ensure justice for victims.

The Council must do more to play a leading role in protecting civilians in situations of urban warfare. Specific statements by the Council noting the particular concerns of urban warfare, including recognizing the differential impact of urban armed conflict on women and girls, can be helpful in bringing this issue to the forefront of the United Nations agenda. We note with appreciation the Secretary-General's annual reports on the protection of civilians. It is also necessary to adequately monitor the implementation of thematic Security Council resolutions related to the protection of civilians, such as resolutions 2286 (2016), on the protection of health-care workers; 2475 (2019); on persons with disabilities; 2417 (2018), on hunger and conflict; and 2601 (2021), on the protection of education in conflict.

In line with the EU's strong commitment to international humanitarian law, we will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to promote compliance with the laws of armed conflict, including the protection of education from attack. That will also be a key theme at the upcoming European Humanitarian Forum. As a world-leading humanitarian donor, the EU is

committed to supporting humanitarian actors during the active conflict phase, addressing the critical needs of populations, undertaking light rehabilitation of key infrastructure such as water stations and networks, hospitals or schools, and ensuring at least minimal services. It is also necessary to create space for humanitarian workers to operate during conflicts.

Authorities, donors, humanitarian and development actors have a key role to play in better preparing for and responding to the long-term impact of protracted conflict in urban settings, by investing in the sustainability and resilience of infrastructures, as soon as the opportunity arises. In that respect, strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus can enhance a holistic approach to addressing urban warfare. Among other actions, development agencies could provide a wealth of information on urban services and technical guidance to humanitarian actors at the outset of an emergency, and humanitarian actors could actively strive to work together with development actors during the early recovery phase, including by clearing explosive remnants of war.

Given the increasing scale of urban warfare, we all need to redouble our efforts to protect civilians and the infrastructure necessary for their survival.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Vidal (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Chile wishes to thank the Permanent Mission of Norway for having convened this meeting. We commend Norway for attaching such importance to the issue under discussion, which is further highlighted by having the Prime Minister of Norway preside over the meeting (see S/PV.8953). We also take this opportunity to thank the briefers for their interventions (see S/PV.8953).

We have been entrusted with the duty to protect civilians. That duty deserves maximum scrutiny and commitment in the way it is addressed, in particular when it comes to urban areas. Such areas, due to the rapid pace of urbanization, are where we are witnessing the extent of the impact of urban warfare, which is estimated to affect 50 million civilians worldwide. Today urbanization is a facilitator of violence, due to such facets as the rise of densification, the anonymity provided by buildings and the dependence of combatants on resources, as well as the frequent use of civilian structures as shelters and shields. Added to that is the disproportionate impact caused by damage to

infrastructure that is critical to the survival of civilians. Such infrastructure often ends up as collateral damage in armed confrontations. By destroying public-service infrastructure and blocking access to humanitarian assistance, conflict irretrievably affects the lives of the civilian population, damaging the supply of items necessary for subsistence, such as food, access to health, sources of electrical energy and fuels. That directly harms the full enjoyment of human rights and the dignity of people, which is especially evident in the condition of children, who see their social environment, schools and hospitals destroyed, and who are often frequently used as soldiers, exposing them to serious physical and psychological consequences.

The international community must therefore place the protection of civilians at the heart of its concerns, in particular with respect to the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children, who suffer the most from the severity of the confrontations. That said, Chile stresses the need for parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with far-reaching impact in populated areas and to evaluate and adapt their choice of weapons and tactics in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law and all relevant instruments. Furthermore, Chile believes that it is not only important to protect civilians, but also to empower and support them, not as victims but as agents of their own stories and leaders of their communities. We must recognize that we, as Member States, have an obligation to carry out our mandate to protect and ensure that civilians can heal and move towards resilience and recovery.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Ms. Squeff (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to thank the delegation of Norway for convening this open debate, which allows us to reflect on the impact of armed conflicts on the civilian population when such conflicts occur in urban environments.

A traditional military approach assumes that urban areas should be avoided and that attacks in urban areas should only be undertaken as a last resort. However, both history and the present show us that the main battles are conducted in cities. Unfortunately, cities are the main targets of military attacks and are increasingly the main battleground in armed conflicts. The very nature of an urban environment challenges the capacity of the parties to a conflict to evaluate with accuracy and to

anticipate collateral damage to civilians and to civilian infrastructure. This demonstrates that guaranteeing full compliance with international humanitarian law in such contexts is all the more critical. The protection of civilians and of civilian infrastructure will therefore depend on how combatants apply the standards that govern the conduct of hostilities.

When war takes place in cities, civilians experience direct and indirect harm, ranging from death and injury to the interruption of basic services and the destruction of infrastructure. One challenge for military forces is how to cope with the threats of the enemy when that enemy is located within or near the population without causing civilian victims or the destruction of critical urban infrastructure. Urban warfare can have devastating consequences for civilians, in particular when the parties to a conflict do not respect the norms of international humanitarian law. However, even supposing that international humanitarian law is upheld, the cumulative effect of urban warfare inevitably leads to human suffering.

Urban environments are precisely where the tension between the military need to defeat the enemy and the challenge to protect civilians becomes most clear. Implementing international humanitarian law in such circumstances implies specific challenges in terms of dissemination, training and the planning of operations. Poorly trained troops and/or poorly planned operations in urban areas significantly increase the exposure of civilians to lethal threats and can turn military operations into humanitarian tragedies. It is essential to ensure that military operations conducted in urban environments comply fully with international humanitarian law, including the principles of precaution, distinction and proportionality.

With regard to the norms of international humanitarian law, it is expected that all parties to an armed conflict in an urban environment adhere to the same or a higher level of diligence that would apply in a non-urban environment. International humanitarian law demands additional measures to ensure the protection of civilians who are the most exposed to hostilities, through appropriate use of tactics, selection of targets and weapons technology. Furthermore, in situations of prolonged urban conflict, responding to the humanitarian needs of civilians is another major challenge due to the interconnected characteristics of urban services and the extremely high dependence of residents on these services. Damage

to urban infrastructure caused by conflicts affect a disproportionately large number of people, which requires large-scale humanitarian efforts.

While wars in cities are not a new phenomenon, there has been a resurgence in urban warfare over the past few decades. It is expected that, by 2035, the majority of the global population will live in cities. That is why urban warfare will continue to be a defining characteristic of armed conflicts in the years to come. Unless the complexities of urban warfare are addressed through coordinated international action, the already unacceptable humanitarian consequences of urban conflicts will only be aggravated. While there is a normative framework concerning the protection of civilians, that normative framework must be translated into concrete results on the ground.

The Security Council must strengthen its efforts to explore the best way to achieve that. The Republic of Argentina would like to reiterate its position of unrestricted support for the promotion and implementation of international humanitarian law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): Ukraine appreciates the initiative of the Norwegian presidency to hold this important debate and expresses its gratitude to the briefers for their useful presentations (see S/PV.8953).

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statements made by the observer of the European Union (EU) and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, I would like to make the following comments in my national capacity.

The issue of war in cities has been an extremely painful one for my country. Just yesterday, Ukraine commemorated one of the most tragic pages in its modern history. On 24 January 2015, the Russian occupation forces shelled the densely populated areas of the Ukrainian city of Mariupol with Grad and Uragan rockets. That heinous attack left 31 civilians, including children, dead and over 100 wounded. The then Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, speaking in this Chamber, labelled the attack as having “knowingly targeted a civilian population” and one that constituted “a violation of international humanitarian law” (S/PV.7368, p.2). That is just one example of the fact that since the very beginning of the Russian aggression,

the residential areas of Ukrainian cities in the conflict areas have been an integral element of the aggressor’s military plans. In the Government-controlled part of Ukraine, such areas have served targets for shelling or terrorist attacks. In the occupied areas, they have been used by the occupiers for the deployment of artillery weapons, with the local population serving as human shields. That has contributed, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to the death of almost 4,000 civilians and up to 900,000 wounded in Donbas. Almost 1.5 million people have had to leave their homes in the occupied areas of Ukraine, becoming internally displaced persons.

In addition, one of the biggest losses caused by combat activity in urban areas is the enormous damage to civilian infrastructure. In Donbas, that is often the result of the indiscriminate shelling by the Russian occupation forces. Conflict-related damage to infrastructure leaves many people with no access to water, sanitation, electricity and fuel. The destruction of infrastructure and deliberate impediments to repair work often result in serious environmental and epidemiological threats. All of that has been a tragic reality for the residents of the occupied part of Donbas, especially during the initial stage of the Russian aggression, when the level of violence on the ground was at its highest.

The civilian population in the situation of conflict in urban areas is also extremely exposed to flagrant violations of human rights. That is exactly the case for the population in the temporarily occupied territories in Donbas and Crimea.

The topic of today’s debate is even more strikingly relevant for Ukrainians living close to the border with Russia and along the administrative line with temporarily occupied Crimea. As we all know, a Russian military force of more than 100,000 soldiers is amassed on the border with Ukraine, against the backdrop of warmongering rhetoric and unacceptable ultimatums by Russia. Its illegitimate and manipulative claims strike at the core of the United Nations, its Charter, purposes and principles, in particular the sovereign equality of States and refraining from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. The State that is questioning international law and the rules-based order now cynically attempts to present itself as a victim in need of security guarantees. One can hardly imagine

a more upside-down way to defend oneself than by plunging one's neighbour into bloodshed and suffering.

Let me reiterate that Ukraine has no intention whatsoever of taking any military action on the occupied parts of its sovereign territory, let alone along the border with Russia. We see no alternative to a political and diplomatic solution to this international armed conflict and will continue to seek any viable option to secure peace. The starting point must begin with Russia de-escalating the security situation on Ukraine's borders and withdrawing from Donbas and Crimea. Since the Council bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, we encourage the Council to make full use of its mandate so as to avoid any escalation of military confrontation. Although it is unimaginable to have the aggressor State among Council members, we do believe in the integrity and the commitment to the United Nations Charter of the other members of the Council — an essential element of the credibility of this body.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Nasir (Indonesia): I thank the delegation of Norway for convening this open debate.

Urban warfare is not a new phenomenon. We are also very familiar with its devastating humanitarian consequences on civilians. A single attack on a densely populated urban area can destroy schools, hospitals, housing and other key infrastructure, killing many and depriving even more of key public services, including often even the most basic necessities required for survival. The Security Council must continue to use its moral weight to protect civilians in armed conflict, especially women and children. In that context, allow me to emphasize three points.

First, we reiterate the calls for global ceasefire. To save lives, all violence must cease. There is no other way. At the same time, humanitarian access must be given to help innocent civilians. Time must be allowed for political dialogue to take place and to give peace a chance. Those who are fighting should make use of ceasefire to look at the devastating impact on the ground and to reassess what the people need.

Secondly, we need to enhance community engagement in the protection of civilians. Policies aimed at protecting civilians should be strategic, inclusive and, most importantly, people oriented.

Local communities must play an integral role in the development and implementation of strategies to protect civilians. Civilian-protection programmes should be tailored to the needs of the affected communities. For Indonesia, genuine community engagement remains one of the most effective tools for peacekeepers to prevent the loss of life.

Thirdly, we need to place women's empowerment at the heart of civilian protection. As agents of civilian protection, women have greater access to communities. They are essential enablers with respect to building trust and confidence. Women play an important role in providing humanitarian assistance during armed conflict and even in preventing conflict from happening in the first place. They also play a role in peace-keeping. Indonesia is committed to increasing the number of female peacekeepers, in line with resolution 2538 (2020). We believe that the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping operations, including at the leadership level, can contribute to more effective community engagement and therefore protection of civilians.

Allow me to conclude by calling on all of us to strengthen our commitment to the Charter of the United Nations. All Members, including the founding Members of the United Nations, need to always uphold such principles as non-use of force, respect for territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for international law. Upholding those key principles saves lives, and that commitment goes beyond the context of armed conflicts. Naturally, our calls go out not only to the Council but also to all who hold a position of responsibility and are able to save those lives.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for holding this open debate on the protection of civilians in urban settings, and for the concept note provided by Norway (S/2022/23, annex), which reflects an understanding and analysis of the significant negative effects of armed conflicts on civilians, especially in cities and populated areas.

Unfortunately, 76 years after the establishment of the United Nations, humankind still suffers from the escalation of wars and armed conflicts, especially non-international ones. The international community remains unable to provide the tools necessary to

protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, despite global consensus on the need to end the suffering of the victims of armed conflicts and to mitigate the effects of said conflicts. Countries of the South, especially in Africa and the Middle East, are most affected by armed conflicts and their disastrous repercussions on the people. I note in this regard what the Secretary-General said this morning about the destruction and casualties of wars in our Arab region, the latest of which was the war on Gaza in May 2021 (see S/PV.8953). The grave violations committed against civilians in these conflicts are being met with indifference, as if the lives of people, children and women in those regions had no value.

I have referred to non-international or domestic wars, which constitute the majority of armed conflicts. Unfortunately, parties to those conflicts try to avoid their obligations towards civilians under international humanitarian law by refusing to acknowledge that those conflicts are actually armed conflicts, describing them instead as internal clashes or as legitimate fights against terrorism, as if fighting terrorism were an excuse to target civilians and collectively punish them. Parties to many of these conflicts do not acknowledge that international humanitarian law is applicable to internal domestic armed conflicts. The responsibility rests in that regard with the Security Council and States parties to the 1949 Geneva Convention and its protocols. They must compel parties to such conflicts to respect their legal obligations related to protecting civilians and civilian targets. They must leave no doubt that international humanitarian law is applicable to those conflicts.

The Council has an important role to play by reaching consensus on standards that should be applicable to all armed conflicts, international and internal, especially when it comes to protecting civilians in urban areas. That includes prohibiting the excessive use of force and weapons that cause grave harm to civilians. Parties must abide by the principles of necessity and proportionality in the use of force, as well as the principle of precaution in military operations. The concept of military objective must be interpreted in the narrowest of senses. The Council must show parties to a conflict that the international community is monitoring their behaviour by deploying fact-finding missions during conflicts, by authorizing criminal investigations of violations and by referring situations to international criminal justice, where applicable. Impunity is what in

many cases emboldens parties to a conflict to violate international humanitarian law. States also must be resolute in confronting such violations against civilians as indiscriminate attacks against populated areas and the collective punishment of civilians. The concept of criminal accountability must be consolidated in their military doctrines, the rules of engagement must prohibit such violations and perpetrators must be held accountable before their courts.

We must raise awareness and promote a culture of respect for international humanitarian law, nationally and internationally. It is important to pressure parties to conflicts in urban areas to commit to not attacking civilian targets and to declaring safe zones where no party undertakes military operations. They must also respect the role of the Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Humanitarian organizations must also work under the auspices of the United Nations, while upholding the principles of humanitarian action, especially non-discrimination and neutrality to reduce the risk of being targeted.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): Slovakia highly appreciates your initiative, Madam President, to organize this open debate on the protection of civilians in urban settings, which is indeed relevant and of grave concern. Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

The Secretary General — who, together with other speakers, I would like to thank for today's remarks — pointed out in his 2021 report that armed conflicts continue to be characterized by

“high levels of civilian deaths, injury and psychological trauma, sexual violence, torture and disappearance, as well as damaged and destroyed homes, schools ... hospitals and essential civilian infrastructure (*S/2021/423, para. 2*).

He also highlighted the disproportionate impact of explosive weapons on civilian populations in urban settings. Moreover, the already grave general situation has been further exacerbated by the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Slovakia seizes this opportunity to express its strong commitment to international humanitarian law and the principles on which it is based. Respect for international humanitarian law is an irreplaceable tool

for the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict. The theatres of armed conflict have increasingly shifted from open battlefields to populated areas, which has had a devastating humanitarian impact on civilians.

We must beef up our efforts to prevent, minimize and mitigate the adverse impacts of military operations on civilian populations in order to protect them from threats and acts of physical violence, which in recent times we have unfortunately seen occur far too often. That approach must be based on the core principles of international humanitarian law, under which all parties to conflicts have an obligation to protect civilians.

They also have the obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objects and to ensure that attacks comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality. In that regard, the Security Council clearly plays a crucial role in condemning every breach of those obligations so that respect for international humanitarian law becomes a reality rather than merely existing on paper.

With regard to identifying avenues for increasing the protection of civilians in urban settings, we would like to highlight the following three points.

First, the international community should seize every opportunity to call on all parties to armed conflict to avoid fighting in urban settings.

Secondly, it is also of paramount importance to strengthen data collection on civilian harm, support establishing the relevant investigative and data collection mechanisms and hold accountable the perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, we must expand the traditional understanding of the protection of civilians and adapt our approach to new realities and challenges, particularly with regard to the development of new technologies and their deployment in armed conflict.

Furthermore, it is also essential that the different components of the United Nations system work together as a whole and support each other effectively. We must also achieve better results in promoting the nexus between peace and security, development, humanitarian action and international humanitarian law. Often we do not move beyond the verbal stage of our work. We need to achieve better, tangible results in practical situations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Ms. Eneström (Sweden): I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country, Sweden.

We thank Norway for organizing this important signature event. We welcome the remarks made by the Secretary-General and by Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Armed conflicts are increasingly being fought in urban areas, with devastating consequences for civilians. We share the concerns of the Secretary-General and call upon all parties to armed conflict to prevent civilian harm resulting from the use in populated areas of explosive weapons, particularly those with wide-area effects. In addition to the civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure they cause, armed conflicts often disrupt the delivery of basic services such as health care and education. That increases the burden on the humanitarian system, which is already overstretched.

That increasingly pressing problem deserves the full attention of the Security Council and adequate monitoring of the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Council and the international community as a whole have a shared responsibility to fully uphold and respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international humanitarian principles. We recall our joint obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, as enshrined in article 1 common to the Geneva Conventions. The Nordic countries are strong defenders of the rules-based international order, at the heart of which is international law, including international humanitarian law.

We are key humanitarian donors and actively engage in conflict resolution around the globe. We would like to emphasize in particular three aspects of today's debate.

First, we would like to highlight the importance of safeguarding objects that are indispensable to the survival of civilians. The fact that the risk of collateral damage is higher in urban settings must not be an excuse, but rather a strong imperative for even more caution and prudence. In that context, we welcomed the adoption last year of the landmark resolution 2573

(2021), on the protection of civilian infrastructure in global conflicts, and call on all parties to armed conflicts to fully adhere to its provisions.

Secondly, the targeting of humanitarian and health-care personnel must end. International humanitarian law is clear: medical workers, facilities and transport must be protected. The wounded and sick must be cared for and spared. Attacks on medical care — which is protected under international humanitarian law — amount to war crimes and may further aggravate ongoing armed conflicts. They may also undermine the Security Council's efforts to maintain international peace and security. In that context, we call on all parties to armed conflict to comply with the relevant international law, including resolution 2286 (2016), on attacks on hospitals.

Thirdly, continued access to education in armed conflicts is crucial for the protection and future of children and young people. In that context, we call for the protection of education and the implementation of resolution 2601 (2021).

There is no lack of international instruments to protect civilians in urban settings. Unfortunately, what we are missing is respect for, and compliance with, both international humanitarian law and international humanitarian principles. In that context, we would like to highlight the ICRC guidance document entitled "Protecting health care: Guidance for the armed forces", which can provide practical examples of how to protect health care while carrying out military operations and hopefully inspire better implementation.

Accountability is necessary, not only to ensure justice for the victims of breaches of international humanitarian law but also to prevent and deter future violations. We must ensure that accountability is an integral part of how we work to strengthen compliance with and implementation of international humanitarian law.

Last but not least, we would like to pay tribute to the brave humanitarian health-care workers who work — often at personal risk — to address the needs of people affected by warfare in urban settings. Needless to say, attacks, threats and intimidation against those brave men and women are unacceptable.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): I would like to express my appreciation to Norway for placing the protection of civilians among the priorities of its Security Council presidency. I thank Secretary-General António Guterres and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for outlining the evolving challenges with respect to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, particularly those civilians who are trapped in conditions of urban warfare.

The presence and intervention of the Prime Minister of Norway earlier today during this open debate demonstrates the high importance and urgency of protecting civilians. I would like to acknowledge Norway's long-standing and historic record in humanitarian affairs.

In Armenia, we remember dearly the legacy of the great humanitarian Fridtjof Nansen, whose name is often associated with the principles of human rights. Documents for stateless persons — widely known as "Nansen passports" — issued at the initiative of Nansen in his role as League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, were instrumental for the protection of civilians, including tens of thousands of survivors of the Armenian genocide, in the aftermath of the First World War.

Armed conflicts characterized by intense levels of warfare, with massive and targeted uses of heavy weaponry and prohibited armaments, turn densely populated areas, cities and settlements into zones of devastation. The placement of military installations and positions in, or in close vicinity to, residential neighbourhoods further complicates the safety and security of civilians and threatens their lives.

In our region, we are faced with the consequences of Azerbaijan's brutal use of force against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, which claimed thousands of lives, brought devastation to civilians and destroyed residential buildings, hospitals, schools, churches and critical infrastructure. The cities of Stepanakert, Shushi, Martakert, Martuni and Hadrut were targeted by multiple-launch rocket systems, heavy artillery, unmanned aerial vehicles and prohibited weapons such as cluster munitions.

Launching a war in the middle of a global pandemic, in gross violation of the existing ceasefire agreement and international humanitarian law, must be acknowledged for what it represents: a premeditated and carefully planned and executed attempt to inflict

maximum casualties that fully demonstrates an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, an ethnic group. No amount of distorted narrative or false justification for military action can alter the truth and the facts on the ground.

The obstruction and politicization of granting United Nations agencies safe and unhindered humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh has undermined international efforts to conduct comprehensive assessments of the humanitarian situation and the protection and recovery needs and human rights of the affected population.

Armenia appreciates the unique role of the International Committee of the Red Cross in addressing the immediate life-saving needs of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh and channelling urgent humanitarian assistance.

The activities of the humanitarian response centre of the Russian Federation's peacekeeping forces in Artsakh have also been instrumental in providing vital assistance and services to the population, while at the same time conducting humanitarian demining and clearing thousands of unexploded ordnance and explosive objects from residential areas and agricultural fields.

The evolving methods of warfare and the further sophistication of weapon systems necessitate stronger efforts by the international community to ensure the full implementation of the obligations under the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. The United Nations and the international community should have the ability and capacity to identify and address situations of gross violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law to ensure that people trapped in conflict situations are not left behind and have access to humanitarian assistance, in line with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

While we recognize that there may be inherent limitations of the working methods of international structures, allow me to conclude by emphasizing the need to be impartial but not value-neutral.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Mr. Maes (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I thank Norway for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in urban areas.

Luxembourg fully endorses the statements made on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends for the Protection of Civilians.

The Secretary-General's 2021 annual report (S/2021/423) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict highlighted the devastating impact of the use of explosive weapons in urban areas on civilians and critical civilian infrastructure, including schools. Urbanization will continue to accelerate those trends.

In the post-conflict context, rehabilitating damaged critical infrastructure can take years and delay the return of displaced people. Access for humanitarian organizations is limited, and sometimes entire cities are destroyed on such a scale that they are beyond reconstruction, as in the case of Syria.

The impact and suffering that occurs when schools are attacked and closed weighs not only on adults and children — especially young girls — but also on society as a whole. In the absence of access to education, many children must go to work. Once children have taken that path, it is often impossible for them to return to school, which reinforces a cycle of exploitation and poverty and makes them vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. The protection of education must therefore remain a priority. Luxembourg remains firmly committed to the Safe Schools Declaration and urges all States to join it.

That view also forms part of Luxembourg's approach to its membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2022 to 2024. We have made the protection and promotion of the rights of children, including those affected by armed conflict, a priority for our term. Luxembourg will also continue to focus, through humanitarian action, on the protection of children and education in emergency situations, in particular with respect to access to education for girls.

As the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) pointed out in his briefing, greater respect for international humanitarian law is needed to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population. The ICRC is one of Luxembourg's long-standing humanitarian partners. In the wake of the deplorable cyberattack that recently targeted the ICRC, we want to assure the ICRC that it can continue to count on Luxembourg's solidarity and active support in promoting respect for international humanitarian law at all levels by all parties to conflicts. That respect is essential for guaranteeing the protection and dignity of all, especially those in urban areas.

Those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law must also be held accountable. There must be an end to impunity. In that regard, Luxembourg stresses the important role of the International Criminal Court.

The collection of data on the impact of conflicts on civilians in urban areas is essential and must be strengthened. We must also link the protection of civilians in urban areas with post-conflict peacebuilding. In that context, we must better link humanitarian action with development activities.

Finally, Luxembourg continues to support the development of a political declaration in which States would commit themselves to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and welcomes the negotiations led by Ireland in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Caccia: The Holy See would like to thank Norway for organizing today's important debate.

Since the Second World War, the vast majority of civilian casualties have resulted from internal, rather than international, conflicts. While the Protocol Additional II to the Geneva Conventions extends protections for civilians in those conflicts, such protection has proven inadequate in the face of what Pope Francis calls another world war, fought piecemeal, which increasingly involves harm to civilians in densely populated areas where, sadly, the deafening noise of conflict has been intensifying.

Every year, tens of millions of people now suffer the consequences of armed conflict in cities. The Secretary-General has further reported that civilians make up almost 90 per cent of those killed or injured by explosive weapons in urban settings. Such statistics demonstrate that in densely populated areas, distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants is very difficult, calling into question whether the use of explosives in such settings is lawful at all.

Beyond the initial tragic loss of life, urban warfare can devastate critical civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, sanitation systems, schools and places of worship. Meanwhile, explosive remnants contaminate urban centres, complicating the return of displaced persons, hindering reconstruction efforts

and inhibiting integral human development long after conflicts are settled.

In recent years, the Security Council has taken steps to rectify the issue of inadequate recourse by parties to armed conflict to the principles of distinction and proportionality. Resolution 2573 (2021) demands that parties to armed conflict refrain from attacking objects critical to the survival of civilian populations and rightly expresses grave concern at the establishment of military positions in densely populated areas, which treats non-combatants as pawns of war rather than as a class of people to whom protection is owed.

In that regard, the Holy See supports efforts responding to the call of the Secretary-General to develop a political declaration in which States commit themselves to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, including the ongoing consultations process to that end led by Ireland.

While States bear the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians from the effects of explosives, everyone is bound to observe the limitations imposed by international humanitarian law to protect defenceless peoples and civilian structures. Efforts to constrain the use of explosive weapons in urban settings should therefore engage all parties, including non-State actors, including those operating in conflict settings.

The Holy See would also like to acknowledge the tireless work of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is our sincere hope that today's open debate will advance measures to protect civilians in armed conflict and end the culture of impunity that has sown death and suffering among urban populations. For their sake, we pray that the words expressed here today are translated into concrete action.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): South Africa wishes to thank Norway for convening this important open debate, which highlights the effects of conflict on civilians, including those in urban settings, as well as the imperative to enhance efforts to ensure their protection. I also wish to thank the briefers for their insightful briefings this morning.

Urban areas are largely concentrated and are centres of social and economic activities. It is therefore of grave concern that urban areas are often deliberately targeted in escalating and protracted wars. We have heard from

other speakers about the detrimental impacts of conflict in urban settings, including the death and injury of civilians and damage to infrastructure.

The Geneva Conventions and the principles of international humanitarian law clearly stipulate the obligations of parties to armed conflict to primarily protect civilians and civilian objects. South Africa underlines the importance of all actors, including those who are involved in armed conflicts, to ensure that they comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

It is regrettable, however, that the plight of civilians in protracted conflict situations, such as in Palestine and Western Sahara, seems to not receive adequate attention, while accountability for violations against civilians in those territories remains elusive. Current and recent armed conflicts, such as the conflict in Gaza, have continued to expose the devastating effects on civilians of the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas.

The use of explosive weapons exacerbates the humanitarian crisis for people living in the Gaza Strip and negatively impacts civilians' living conditions and livelihoods. The destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as houses, schools and hospitals, as well as the impact on the environment, will further intensify the long-term consequences of the escalation of violence. We now wish to make a few points.

First, the Security Council and Member States need to be pragmatic and innovative in developing tailor-made solutions to the specific needs of the affected communities, taking into consideration the particular dynamics of each context.

Secondly, we suggest that drawdowns of United Nations missions include a protection-of-civilians mandate. The Security Council may wish to consider adjusting the procedure for drawdowns based on a benchmark system similar to the one implemented in the Central African Republic. That could better ensure that countries are adequately competent to protect civilian populations before drawdowns take place. Such benchmarks may also assist in better gauging the situation of conflict on the ground while the future of a mission is considered.

Thirdly, Member States ought to engage and encourage partnerships with local authorities, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other

humanitarian organizations to protect and assist in building essential urban services that are resilient, especially during challenging times.

Finally, the international community must shore up political will and act immediately and without selectivity to protect human lives and peacefully and justly resolve the conflicts plaguing our world. In doing so, we must not be seen to favour the protection of some people while ignoring the plight of others. It is important that we work together to reduce violence and help cities and communities better cope with fragility in order to mitigate the effects of wars on people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

Mr. Paulauskas (Lithuania): Lithuania sincerely thanks the Norwegian presidency for holding this important open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the other briefers for their briefings.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union (EU). I would also like to make the following comments in my national capacity.

We fully agree with those who have underlined that the scourge of urban warfare is a growing problem. The estimates that 50 million civilians worldwide are affected by fighting in heavily populated areas are evidence of the challenges faced in upholding international humanitarian law across the world.

As noted in the EU statement, the responsibility for protecting civilians in cities rests predominantly with those who are fighting. The particular challenges of combat in urban areas pose severe dangers to those civilians who are trapped in cities. The international community must be more outspoken in holding combatants up to the standards of international humanitarian law. That means condemning violations and finding political and practical solutions to protect civilians and civilian objects and ensuring that those responsible for any breaches of international humanitarian law be held to account.

Special attention is needed to acknowledge the particular vulnerabilities of the groups that are sometimes overlooked. Armed conflicts have devastating impacts on children, who are especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Women and girls in conflict-affected areas can find themselves subjected to appalling levels of sexual

and gender-based violence. They also suffer targeted attacks, intimidation, abductions, forced marriages and restrictions of movement based on their sex. People with disabilities are disproportionately impacted and experience even higher levels of risk in war zones.

I would also like to note the situation in our region. Today Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine do little to inspire confidence, except for the willingness of Russian-backed forces to comply with the principle of distinction. The region has seen indiscriminate and deliberate shelling, resulting in widespread damage to civilian infrastructure and property. Currently, nearly 4,000 civilians have been killed and 1.5 million internally displaced.

The challenges faced daily by residents of eastern Ukraine — or along the line of contact — are significant. Key infrastructure, such as water-pumping stations that serve communities, continue to be exposed to shelling. Entire villages have been without electricity for weeks. Mines and unexploded ordnance are an additional layer of risk for people living close to the line of contact. Too many families have lost loved ones or seen them severely injured while working in the fields, going to school or simply playing in the yard. Hundreds of people are still searching for their missing family members.

Regretfully, despite all the diplomatic efforts, Russia further escalates and continues military deployments around the Ukraine borders in Crimea. Moreover, Russian troops are deployed in Belarus as well, so we find ourselves on the eve of another potential invasion, discussing how best to avert such a tragedy. Clearly it is up to the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to call out breaches of international humanitarian law.

Cooperation between the development and humanitarian sectors, as well as support for humanitarian actors in the early stages of a conflict in addressing the critical needs of the population, can do much to ameliorate the immediate emergency and may even positively affect the direction of a conflict.

Lithuania remains committed to strengthening the capacity of humanitarian actors to better prepare and respond to emergencies, in particular conflicts in urban settings.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Kridelka (Belgium): Belgium aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and with the statement of the Group of Friends on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

This is a critical time for civilians in conflict settings, a time when respect for international humanitarian law has dropped to an all-time low and at the same time humanitarian needs have increased to an all-time high. The resurgence of urban warfare in the last decades has had a devastating impact on civilian populations, infrastructure and essential services such as schools and hospitals, with civilians now representing close to 90 per cent of the casualties. More recently, the coronavirus disease pandemic has further exacerbated those trends.

Belgium supports a multidimensional approach to the protection of civilians, an approach based on prevention, protection and assistance activities adapted to the urban context. That approach would also ensure child protection and child-protection mainstreaming and pay particular attention to the most vulnerable groups and individuals, such as refugees, children, unaccompanied and separated children, girls and women, people with disabilities, the elderly and other communities.

What can we do all together? I wish to quickly underline six points.

First, Belgium calls on all parties to armed conflict to strictly comply with international humanitarian law and respect its rules and principles, in particular strict compliance with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack. The prohibition of direct attacks against civilians and civilian objects is key to ensuring the protection of civilians in conflict settings.

Secondly, Belgium calls for the full implementation of the commitments contained in resolution 2573 (2021) to protect access to essential services. Parties to armed conflict should further integrate concrete measures to safeguard the humanitarian space and protect health care and essential civilian facilities, including in counter-terrorism and sanctions contexts.

Thirdly, concerning explosive weapons in populated areas, additional measures such as the development of urban-warfare-specific policies, the exchange of good practices between armed forces and the training of military personnel on the specific demands of the urban

environment could further contribute to improving the implementation of international humanitarian law. In that respect, Belgium welcomes the ongoing consultation process led by Ireland aimed at developing a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons.

Fourthly, turning to humanitarian access, Belgium calls on parties to armed conflict to provide and facilitate rapid and unimpeded access to humanitarian relief, and we urge all parties to facilitate humanitarian access. My country further calls on donors to provide flexible, multi-year funding to humanitarian organizations to ensure longer-term systemic support to civilian populations and to strengthen the resilience of essential service systems. The development of partnerships with relevant actors, in particular local communities and essential service providers, is also key.

Fifthly, the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes remains one of Belgium's priorities. Belgium continues to support international justice and accountability mechanisms for violations of international law, and we urge all States Members of the United Nations to do the same. In that regard, my country is concerned about reports of a lack of accountability for crimes against children in armed conflict. We call for the systematic recognition of children as a category of victims in their own right within judicial processes so as to strengthen accountability for violations affecting them.

Sixthly, my last but not least point is precisely about children and armed conflict. Children are the most vulnerable victims of conflicts and humanitarian disasters. Belgium remains committed to addressing their needs, facilitating access to education and intensifying efforts to prevent and address grave violations against them. My country calls on all parties to particularly address the plight of children and calls for the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and the implementation of the Paris and Vancouver Principles.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): I join my colleagues in thanking the Norwegian presidency for having convened today's debate.

I wish also to align myself with the statement made earlier today by the delegation of the European Union, and in my national capacity I would like to add the following.

We are deeply alarmed by the findings in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2021/423) that civilians continue to be dramatically affected by armed conflicts.

My country has its own bitter experience of falling victim to disproportionate attacks, not in the remote past but in 2008, when Georgia became the subject of full-scale military aggression from its neighbour Russia, in gross violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act. More than 30 cities and villages, including the capital, were shelled with cluster bombs and other types of prohibited munitions.

As a result, more than 400 civilians and military personnel were killed and more than 1,700 wounded; thousands joined the half a million internally displaced persons and refugees expelled during the previous waves of ethnic cleansing; 53 villages in and around the Tskhinvali region were fully cleansed and destroyed; and 35,000 houses belonging to ethnic Georgians were deliberately burnt and ruined.

The judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of 21 January 2021, which attested to Russia's ongoing occupation and effective control of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, confirmed those violations and the violations of the European-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement and found Russia responsible for human rights violations on the ground as well as for ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population.

While no international human rights mechanisms are allowed inside, and the European Union Monitoring Mission is deprived of the possibility of entering occupied regions to fully implement its mandate, Russia is continuing to build a considerable military footprint in Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions and is taking steps towards their de facto annexation.

The aggression and occupation policy and hybrid methods of warfare, well tested against my own country, are now being used against Ukraine. After eight years of armed aggression and the illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, we are witnessing an unprecedented military build-up and further looming military threats.

It is imperative that the international community remain committed to defending its principles. It is of particular necessity that international organizations be firm and vocal on Russia's responsibility in terms of both human rights violations and the denial of access for international human rights mechanisms on the ground. Russia needs to be strongly and continuously reminded that threatening any country's sovereignty and territorial integrity is totally unacceptable. It must fulfil its international obligations, including the European Union-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement and the Minsk agreements, and withdraw its forces from the territory of its sovereign neighbouring States.

For its part, my country reiterates its readiness to contribute to the Secretary-General's endeavour to mobilize the international community's political will and commitment to prioritizing the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to sincerely thank you, Madam President, for having convened this important meeting, which addresses one of the most prominent issues before the Security Council.

We would like to express our surprise at the selection by the Security Council of the speaker from Sana'a, whose briefing was biased and who failed, unfortunately, to speak of the facts with integrity and neutrality. She also failed to mention the horrendous crimes and violations perpetrated by the Houthi militias against civilians, displaced persons and civilian objects, especially in Marib, Taiz, Al-Hudaydah and other Yemeni areas.

We reject all allegations against the Yemeni Government and the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, but we welcome the voices of civil society, as they enrich discussions and highlight many important issues. Nevertheless, we call on the Council to be careful in its selection of civil society briefers, in order to maintain objectivity, integrity and impartiality.

There is a dire need to protect civilians in conflict, which requires the international community and the Security Council to take effective measures that protect civilians in their cities and displacement camps from attacks and acts of aggression that they face in many regions throughout the world, including crimes and

terrorist attacks that are perpetrated by the Houthi militias against civilians and civilian objects in Yemen, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Those crimes and terrorist attacks constitute an egregious violation of international law and international humanitarian law, and are a real threat to vital civilian objects, including energy facilities, in addition to the stability of the global economy, thereby undermining international and regional peace and security.

The Houthi attack against the city of Marib, which has a population of 4 million people of whom there are more than 2 million displaced persons, has been ongoing for more than 11 months. It constitutes one of the most prominent examples of the danger that threatens the life and safety of civilians in conflict. Despite extensive condemnation by the international community and the Council's numerous calls for the Houthis to stop their massacres of Yemenis, the Houthi militias continue to target civilians and civilian objects by using ballistic missiles, drones and other heavy weaponry, leaving hundreds dead and thousands injured, mostly women and children, in addition to destroying schools, hospitals and places of worship in violation of all international laws and norms.

Houthi crimes against civilians have included taking citizens as hostages within entire cities and villages, using them as human shields while turning schools into weapons warehouses, governmental buildings into detention centres, and roofs of houses into sniping positions for targeting civilians. The ongoing siege of cities by these militias is depriving citizens of the ability to move freely or to have access to water and food. Indeed, starvation is being used as a means of war. The most prominent examples of that are the siege against the Abdiyyah district of Marib and the plight of the city of Taiz, which has been under siege for more than seven years, while the international community has remained inexplicably silent.

Although, at the end of 2021, the Yemeni Government appreciated the first visits of United Nations officials in seven years, we nevertheless reiterate that the international community must call for the siege against Taiz and the other Yemeni cities under attack be lifted, and it must call for ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need and for stopping Houthi militias from obstructing the work of international organizations and preventing aid from reaching those who deserve it.

The planting of internationally prohibited mines, including antipersonnel mines, is one of the most dangerous threats that face civilians in conflict areas. In Yemen, which is a signatory of the 1997 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and which destroyed its stockpiles of these vicious weapons, the Houthi militias have made nearly 2 million mines and explosive devices and planted them in many areas of Yemen that they once controlled and then withdrew from, leaving hundreds of civilians exposed, only to become victims, including children and women.

Mines paralyse the movement of Yemenis and threaten millions of civilians and internally displaced persons who are stranded between the hammer of the Houthi bombardment on cities and camps and the hard rock of landmines planted near their homes, streets, cities and pastures thereby affecting the livelihoods of millions. Notwithstanding the significant efforts of the National Army and the Masam mine-clearance project, the density of and the indiscriminate way these mines were planted — and the absence of maps — constitute a staggering challenge, threatening the lives of future generations.

The most significant example of this phenomenon is the Houthi militia militarization of Al-Hudaydah and other cities on the west coast of the country, transforming them into labyrinths of mines that obstruct humanitarian organizations and threaten civilian lives. Recently, two children were killed, and yesterday another child was injured, as a result of mines planted by the Houthi militias in the city of Hais in Al-Hudaydah.

The war would not have gone on this long, and thousands of lives could have been spared, were it not for the military support provided to the Houthi militias by the rogue Iranian regime and the Lebanese Hezbollah, in order to target civilians and civilian objects. Indeed, the Iranian regime's supplying the Houthi militia with weapons, including ballistic missiles, is an egregious violation of relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015). It also shows Iran's disdain for the efforts by the international community to maintain international and regional peace and security.

The Security Council must therefore make efforts to protect civilians, especially in my country, Yemen,

and implement its resolutions, and it must take a decisive stance to deter and hold accountable those who violate its resolutions. It must stop the smuggling of weapons, which prolongs the war and exacerbates the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, leading to daily civilian bloodshed in the country and obstructing any progress in the United Nations-led peace process to put an end to the Yemeni crisis and realize sustainable and just peace on the basis of the terms of reference of an agreed political solution — a peace to which all Yemenis aspire.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Lam Padilla (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala thanks the Norwegian presidency of the Security Council for convening today's open debate on "Wars in cities: protection of civilians in urban settings", as well as all the briefers for their briefings.

As a contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Guatemala believes that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, as well as for the protection and promotion of human rights, lies with the host State. The protection of civilians is an effort complementary to United Nations peacekeeping operations, the objective of which requires a comprehensive and integrated approach among civilian, police, military and prison components in coordination with national authorities, as well as local communities and relevant humanitarian organizations, in order to create and maintain a protective environment for civilians.

Guatemala is aware that the effective implementation of mandates, including the protection of civilians, is the responsibility of all parties and depends on several critical factors, including, inter alia, well-defined, realistic and achievable mandates; political will, leadership and performance, and accountability at all levels; adequate resources and assets for mobility; trained and properly equipped military, police and civilian personnel; and capacities to assess threats to civilians.

Guatemala expresses its concern about the increase in the number of incidents taking place with improvised explosive devices in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, as well as the negative impact on the protection of civilians and the security of peacekeeping forces, which leads to the need to invest more in the mitigation of threats and

this type of weaponry. On the other hand, Guatemala considers that successful transitions in peace missions require an integrated planning process that brings together the actors of the United Nations system, the State and civil society, as well as the international community. In this regard, Guatemala notes with concern the negative experience of the transition from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti to the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti. We believe that we must learn from experiences and failures in previous peace missions.

Guatemala believes that the protection-of-civilians mandate could be improved by recognizing the main challenges of a country's specific situation and prioritizing political commitments, partnerships, performance, accountability and adequate resources. Guatemala will continue to provide special forces and personnel in general to participate in United Nations peacekeeping missions with mandates to protect civilians with the highest level of effectiveness and efficiency, thereby fulfilling our unqualified commitment to actively contributing to maintaining and sustaining international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Penaranda (Philippines): We congratulate Norway for its presidency of the Security Council this month, and thank you, Madam President, for convening this important meeting today. We were honoured in the Council this morning with the presence of His Excellency Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre.

The protection of civilians is at the front and centre of peacekeeping operations. As security threats, whether conventional or asymmetric, continue to evolve with operating environments in a pandemic context, the risk they pose to the civilian population cannot be overstated. One thing is clear — success in peacekeeping operations must be measured by how well we protect civilians.

I wish to highlight three points today.

First, we encourage troop- and police-contributing countries to prioritize the protection of civilians under threat of danger by using all the necessary means when required, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, mission mandates and applicable international law. Expectations regarding protection tasks must be succinct and clear, connected to political strategies in

the field and focused on prevention. We also recognize the contributions of unarmed civilian protection in peacekeeping operations.

Secondly, modern warfare in an urban setting must be approached with a more proactive stance, using advanced weapons systems designed for effective and responsible military operations. An advanced guided munitions system, coupled with well-designed target development capabilities, is an effective tool to respond to the challenges of highly volatile and complex urban warfare.

These modern weapons systems, in tandem with a sound mitigation mechanism, should help minimize, if not avoid, the loss of civilian lives during armed conflicts. Nevertheless, the decision to employ weapons to gain military advantage must fully take into account domestic laws and international legal obligations. The Philippines therefore supports the adoption of a comprehensive civilian harm-mitigation approach as a matter of international policy, with the strong, unequivocal commitment of Member States.

Thirdly, the Philippines adheres to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance. We respect and abide by the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional and reiterate the obligation of parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. Our own national laws highlight the Philippines strong commitment to the implementation of the Geneva Conventions at the national and local levels.

It is also important to reinforce close collaboration between the United Nations and the host country on contingency planning, information exchange and risk assessment in relation to the security of United Nations and associated personnel.

Learning the lessons of the 2017 Marawi siege, the need for the protection of civilians in urban settings compels us to pursue the right tactical choices in the context of long-term political solutions.

In conclusion, the use of advanced weapons systems, combined with an acute focus on humanitarian assistance and respect for domestic and international laws and sovereignty, should allow us to better protect civilians in urban settings.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Let me begin by thanking the Permanent Mission of Norway for organizing this important high-level debate on the theme “Protection of civilians in armed conflict: War in cities — protection of civilians in urban settings”. We also welcome the participation of the Prime Minister of Norway in this debate. We thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the other panellists for their insightful briefings.

Civilians have always been the main victims of war, subjected to mass extermination, indiscriminate attacks on their cities, deportation, hostage taking, pillage and internment, which often takes a high toll on civilian life. Protecting civilians during armed conflict is therefore a cornerstone of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. The question is how to protect civilians when the suppression of civilians is the very object of a military’s operations. That is so when colonial and foreign occupation forces resort to the forcible denial of the right of peoples to self-determination and attempt to perpetuate their own illegal occupation.

That is vividly illustrated in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. On 21 January 1989, Indian occupation forces killed 52 Kashmiri civilians in the infamous Gawkadal massacre in Srinagar. Since then, in the subsequent decade, they killed 96,000 Kashmiris, widowed around 23,000 women, raped more than 11,250 women and girls and destroyed over 100,000 dwellings, including schools and houses.

Since 5 August 2019, 900,000 Indian troops have been stationed in Indian-occupied Kashmir — in every city, town, village and neighbourhood — to impose what India’s leaders have themselves ominously called a “final solution” for Jammu and Kashmir. They have resorted to cordon-and-search operations and fake encounters to extrajudicially kill innocent Kashmiri youth; imposed collective punishments to destroy and burn entire Kashmiri neighbourhoods, urban centres and villages; attacked peaceful protesters with live ammunition, including pellet guns that have blinded hundreds of Kashmiri children; arbitrarily detained 13,000 young Kashmiri boys, many of whom have been tortured; and are in the process of changing the demography of occupied Kashmir from a Muslim-majority State to a Hindu-majority territory.

Last year Pakistan released a comprehensive and well-researched dossier covering accounts, corroborated

by audio and video evidence, of 3,432 cases of war crimes perpetrated by senior officers of the Indian occupation forces since 1989. We call on the Security Council to take cognizance of the compelling evidence of those crimes and to hold accountable the Indian officials and personnel responsible for such crimes and grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

India is not a victim of terrorism; it is the mothership of terrorism in South Asia. It is Pakistan that has suffered from terrorism in operations conducted since 2014. We have cleared our territory of terrorist groups. Our major challenge has been the continued terrorist attacks financed, sponsored and supported by our neighbour India including from the territory of Afghanistan.

With the active support of Indian intelligence agencies, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar terrorist groups were involved in over 1,000 cross-border terrorist attacks against Pakistani military and civilian targets in 2020 alone. India has funded and supported Security Council-listed terrorist entities to carry out cross-border terrorist attacks against Pakistani military and civilian targets, including on the Karachi Stock Exchange on 29 June 2020 and in Lahore on 23 June 2021, as well as the killing of Chinese and Pakistani engineers at the Dasu Dam site on 14 July 2021.

With regard to genocide, I would like to draw attention to the anti-Muslim pogrom in New Delhi in February 2020, the almost daily cow lynching and targeted killings of Muslims, the 400 at-tacks against Christian churches last year and the open calls for genocide against the Muslims of India issued by extremist Hindutva priests two weeks ago.

The Security Council must heed Mr. Gregory Stanton, the Chairman of Genocide Watch, who warned last week, “Genocide can happen in India”.

The President: The representative of India has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Ravindran (India): I am constrained to take the floor once again only because the representative of Pakistan chose to sully the Security Council through his Pavlovian and frivolous remarks against my country. While his statement deserves our collective contempt, it is important for me to set the record straight.

This is not the first time that the representative of Pakistan has misused the platform provided by the United Nations to propagate false and malicious

propaganda against my country, seeking in vain to divert the world's attention from the sad state of his country, where terrorists enjoy a free pass while the lives of ordinary people, especially those belonging to the minority, are turned upside down.

Member States are well aware that Pakistan has an established history of harbouring, aiding and actively supporting terrorists. That is a country that has been globally recognized as a sponsor of terrorism and holds the ignoble record of hosting the largest number of terrorists proscribed by the Security Council, to the extent that most of the terrorist attacks around the world today have their origin in some form or another in Pakistan. His Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have been called out for being supporters of terrorists, including Osama Bin Laden, but they continue to carry on down the same path undeterred.

We are discussing the protection of civilians today. The greatest threat to civilians comes from terrorists. As we mentioned earlier, the perpetrators of the heinous terror attack in Mumbai in 2008 continue to enjoy the patronage of the State that he represents.

Let me be categorical about India's position. The entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh were, are and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India, irrespective of what the representative of Pakistan believes or covets. That includes the areas that are under the illegal occupation of Pakistan and we call on Pakistan to immediately vacate all areas under its illegal occupation.

India desires normal neighbourly relations with all countries, including Pakistan, and is committed to addressing outstanding issues, if any, bilaterally and peacefully and in accordance with the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration.

However, any meaningful dialogue can be held only in an atmosphere free of terror, hostility and violence. The onus is on Pakistan to create such a conducive atmosphere. Until then, India will continue to take firm and decisive steps to respond to cross-border terrorism.

The President: The representative of Pakistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): The representative of India has repeated well-worn assertions. The fact of the matter is that terrorism in South Asia originates in India. They have sponsored terrorism in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and all other neighbours and history will attest to that.

With regard to Jammu and Kashmir, it is a territory the destiny of which, as the Security Council has stated, should be decided by its people through a free and fair plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. It is not an integral part of India. If one looks at any United Nations map, it is stamped as "disputed territory". It is disputed territory and certainly not a part of India.

I will conclude by asking the Indian representative two questions.

First, does India prescribe and subscribe to Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations, which states,

"The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter."

Does India subscribe to that Article of the Charter?

Secondly, will India's leaders condemn the call for genocide against the Muslims that was issued on 17 December 2021 in Haridwar in the state of Uttarakhand? Does the Indian Government condemn that call for genocide?

Those are my two questions.

The President: Before concluding, I would like to thank once again all the distinguished participants who joined us today. I would also like to thank the following Member States, which have so far submitted written statements on the subject of today's discussion: Azerbaijan, Myanmar, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda and San Marino. Statements that are received by the end of today will form part of the compilation of statements from this meeting.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.