



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9042nd meeting

Wednesday, 25 May 2022, 2.15 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. DeLaurentis/Mr. Mills/Mr. Hunter (United States of America)

Members:

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Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict
(S/2022/381)

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22-36117 (E)



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The meeting resumed at 2.20 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 Luxembourg.

Mr. Maes (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg is grateful to the United States for having organized this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/381) and the recommendations contained therein.

Luxembourg fully supports the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and the statements on behalf of the Groups of Friends on the protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect. Please allow me to add some remarks in my national capacity.

We are deeply shocked by the devastating impact of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine. A growing number of testimonies and reports describe unbearably brutal attacks by Russian armed forces against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, cities under siege in Ukraine, human trafficking, rape and other forms of sexual violence targeting women and children in particular.

The information gathered and verified by the United Nations and its partners is essential to counter any manipulation of information. For example, between 24 February and 17 May, the World Health Organization (WHO) verified 226 attacks against health-care facilities in Ukraine. That figure represents two thirds of the attacks against such civilian infrastructure that have been verified by WHO throughout the world since the beginning of the year. Let us be very clear: those acts may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Luxembourg would like to stress the need to implement Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilian infrastructure, in particular resolution 2601 (2021), which calls for measures to protect schools from attack. We remain strongly committed to the Safe

Schools Declaration and encourage all States that have not yet done so to sign it.

The protection of persons displaced by armed conflict, in particular women and children, must be guaranteed. We condemn attacks on displaced persons, which make it extremely difficult to provide humanitarian assistance, which is so crucial. Full and unhindered humanitarian access is a necessary precondition for effective humanitarian action, particularly in times of armed conflict.

In that context, we welcome the tireless efforts of our humanitarian partners to protect civilians in increasingly complex situations. I would like to highlight in particular the crucial mandate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and its fundamental role in protecting people affected by conflict and other situations of violence. Luxembourg is proud of the strategic partnership it has built with the ICRC, which can count on our continued support.

International humanitarian law is one of the more powerful tools we have to ensure the protection and dignity of every person and to address the devastating effects of conflicts on civilians. The international community must redouble its efforts to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and lay a foundation for just and lasting peace, not only in Ukraine but also in Afghanistan, Mali, Syria, Yemen and all conflict situations.

Impunity must end. We must do everything to ensure that the perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law be held accountable for their actions and that justice be done for the victims, who must be at the centre of our efforts. In that regard, Luxembourg underscores the important role of the International Criminal Court.

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

Mr. Malovrh (Slovenia): We wish to thank the United States presidency for this open debate and the briefers for their valuable contributions earlier today.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and wishes to make some additional remarks in its national capacity.

We are deeply concerned about the reported numbers of civilian deaths, the immense suffering and the continued violations of international law in too

many armed conflicts throughout the world in 2021. We condemn in the strongest terms the blatant disregard for international law and civilian lives and dignity, and we call for the perpetrators of those international crimes to be held accountable.

As we continue to witness further civilian deaths, suffering and massive displacement, we condemn in the strongest terms the unprovoked Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/381) yet again points out, we need to do more, and we need to do better, to protect civilians and those most affected in armed conflict.

Water infrastructure, housing, schools, hospitals and other crucial infrastructure are vulnerable to indiscriminate attacks, particularly in densely populated areas. We are concerned about the long-term impacts of environmental degradation and destruction, as well as the impacts of the contamination of soil and land, on the civilian population. Slovenia supports initiatives to enhance the protection of water infrastructure and installations, such as the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure, formulated by the Geneva Water Hub, which provides recommendations on how to better protect water infrastructure.

We are particularly alarmed by reports of the rising number of attacks against schools, which constitute grave violations affecting children. Strengthening the protection of education facilities from attacks and restricting their use for military purposes must be a number one priority in armed conflicts. Schools must remain safe havens and enabling environments for children. We call on those who have not yet done so to endorse the Safe School Declaration and promote its implementation.

One of Slovenia's national priorities is to support activities to strengthen human security and enable the recovery and development of conflict-affected countries. Projects and programmes focus on clearing landmines and other explosive remnants of war and provide assistance to landmine victims through care, rehabilitation and reintegration. Psychological and physical assistance and the rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflicts, social rehabilitation training for counsellors and mine-risk education are just some examples of our activities and actions carried out through the Slovenian humanitarian organization ITF Enhancing Human Security.

Preventive action should be our key investment. Respect for, and compliance with, international humanitarian law and international human rights law are essential. All those responsible for crimes against civilians must be prosecuted and punished. Ensuring accountability and fighting impunity for the most serious crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, is an essential component of preventing armed conflicts, protecting civilians and building sustainable peace. International mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court play a key role in those efforts.

Effective and comprehensive peacebuilding and peacekeeping, with robust mandates that are flexible enough to provide protection and assistance to the civilian population, are critical.

In conclusion, the strong and continuous engagement of the Security Council in protecting civilians on the ground is of the utmost importance for protecting people's lives and dignity and alleviating their suffering. We cannot ignore our responsibility to ensure that people's lives and dignity are protected in every setting.

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

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): May I start by expressing our condolences for the loss of lives in the mass shooting in Texas.

Malta thanks the United States for convening this important debate. I also express our gratitude to all the briefers for their valuable briefings and participation in today's meeting.

Malta aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union and would like to add a few remarks in its national capacity.

The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2022/381) makes for sobering reading. It demonstrates how violations of international humanitarian law continue to have a negative — and in some cases deadly — impact on people's lives. Our starting point must be enhancing respect for international humanitarian law.

Malta believes that the Security Council must systematically demand that all parties to armed conflict respect and implement their obligations under international humanitarian law in all circumstances. That body of law places an obligation on parties to

armed conflict to allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian personnel to civilians in need. The safety of such humanitarian personnel must be guaranteed.

Restrictions on humanitarian access are still too frequent, and the impact is most often felt by women, children, elderly persons, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Whether due to bureaucratic reasons, obstacles in engaging with non-State armed groups or attacks suffered by humanitarian personnel, we see humanitarian access being restricted in places such as Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Humanitarian access and assistance must never be politicized. In that vein, we look forward to working with the incoming special adviser on the preservation of humanitarian space and access.

We commend the role of humanitarian workers for their work in protecting civilians in the most challenging circumstances. We also highlight the crucial role of principled humanitarian organizations in engaging with non-State armed groups. Furthermore, we are extremely concerned by the disinformation aimed at eroding trust in humanitarians and casting an unjustifiable shadow of doubt over their activities.

It is regrettable that the international community has been too silent when violations of that body of law are perpetrated. Ensuring accountability for violations is of paramount importance. We underline the complementarity, and sometimes necessarily role, of international judicial bodies, such as the International Criminal Court.

The Security Council has developed a strong protection-of-civilians framework. It is time to fully implement the relevant resolutions, namely, resolution 2175 (2014), on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of health-care workers, resolution 2573 (2021), on the protection of civilian infrastructure, and resolution 2601 (2021), on the protection of education in conflict.

Synergies with other instruments, such as the call for humanitarian action, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Irish-led initiative that seeks to adopt a political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in urban areas, should also be pursued.

Today's challenges, illustrated so vividly in the annual report, are not due to an absence of laws and

norms, but the inability to enforce existing laws and norms. Should Malta be entrusted to serve as an elected member of the Security Council from 2023 to 2024, we will ensure that the protection of civilians continues to underpin our work at the Security Council.

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

Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the United States presidency for again providing us a valuable opportunity to deepen last week's discussion in the Security Council on conflict-induced hunger and other forms of civilian impact (see S/PV.9036).

According to the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2022/381), more than 140 million people were suffering from crisis or heightened levels of food insecurity in 24 States in December 2021, up from 99 million in 2020.

The events in Ukraine have exacerbated that situation, which already extends beyond areas of conflict. Of course, that is not the only impact that concerns Ecuador. The 10 May report mentions the unbearable pain and anguish that has reverberated far beyond Ukraine.

In March alone, my country had to evacuate more than 700 Ecuadorians from Ukraine on several humanitarian flights. We urge the implementation of resolution ES-11/2, by which the General Assembly, in the absence of a Council decision, resolved to demand that all parties protect civilians, including foreign nationals, in particular students, without discrimination, to allow safe, voluntary and unimpeded passage.

We support the efforts of the Secretary-General focusing on the pursuit of peace and the protection of civilians. We also appreciate presidential statement S/PRST/2022/3, of 6 May, by which the Council finally showed unity, and we call for expedited efforts to achieve a lasting ceasefire on that basis. Ecuador is concerned about the overall state of the protection of civilians. In the January open debate on war in cities, I recalled that this year was also central to efforts to advance the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, adopted in Quito, which recognizes the humanitarian impact of war on urban areas (see S/PV.8953).

We are concerned about the military use of schools, and we therefore call for the implementation of the

Safe Schools Declaration. The Council must further deepen its efforts against the use of explosives in populated areas.

We also condemn the threats and attacks against health-care providers, six years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016). We condemn any attack that deprives civilian populations of goods essential for their survival, which is why last year we co-sponsored resolution 2573 (2021).

We reiterate our commitment to continuing to support the efforts of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society to promote the effective implementation of international humanitarian law and to alleviate the impact and suffering caused by conflict.

I would like to conclude my statement by expressing Ecuador's deep concern about the alarming numbers of journalists killed in conflict zones in 2021. Recently, the Committee on Information, which I chaired, observed a moment of silence in honour of them and of the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, whose murder shocked the Organization. But the best way to pay tribute to their lives and service is by strengthening the work of the Security Council and the United Nations system in protecting journalists and, even more so, by redoubling efforts for the peaceful and urgent resolution of all conflicts as a core priority of humankind.

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

Mr. Skoog: I thank the United States for putting this very important issue on the agenda. I also thank our briefers this morning. I express special admiration and appreciation for the remarkable work that humanitarian organizations are doing to protect civilians every day.

Given the time constraints, I will deliver a much-abbreviated version of my statement now and will distribute the full statement through other means.

I am speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

The EU is deeply concerned by the pervasiveness of armed conflicts across the globe, which cause immense

suffering to millions of civilians. The latest example is Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

The EU is also deeply concerned by the impact of the widespread and indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas against civilians and civilian infrastructure. In that regard, we support the ongoing process to develop a political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas.

The EU will use all the tools at its disposal to strengthen international humanitarian law and promote accountability for violations. Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU has been very active in supporting initiatives aimed at ensuring that perpetrators of serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law be held accountable, including the investigations started by the International Criminal Court, the Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry, national investigations by the Ukrainian authorities and investigations by EU member States.

The EU notes with deep concern that the number of attacks against health facilities and medical personnel continues to increase. The EU is committed to supporting the collection and analysis of data on attacks against medical personnel and implementing concrete measures to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

Mental health and psychosocial support is an integral part of the EU humanitarian response to crises, especially for civilians affected by the devastating consequences of conflict. To step up our efforts in that domain, the EU is supporting a pilot programme to provide related services, entitled the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Minimum Services Package.

The EU and its member States note with concern the figures on conflict-driven hunger, as presented in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381). When the impact of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine on global food security is accounted for, the picture will likely be even more dire. The EU supports the Secretary-General's initiative to create a global crisis response group. We call for a strong coordination of the international efforts to address this crisis, such as the Global Alliance for Food Security and the Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission.

However, those efforts are still insufficient to cover the needs. We call for increased contributions

from international partners. More efforts are needed to alleviate hunger in armed conflict, in line with resolution 2417 (2018). We condemn the destruction of the environment as a means of warfare, especially where the civilian population is directly dependent on its natural resources for water, food and livelihoods. We will continue to advocate for the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict.

The EU and its member States are very concerned about the ever-increasing number of forcibly displaced people in the world. We share the Secretary-General's concern about the dramatic increase in the number of internally displaced persons and the severe challenges they face. The EU reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's efforts to develop a draft action agenda on internal displacement.

Children remain disproportionately affected by armed conflict, including through an increasing rate of attacks on education facilities and a high level of sexual violence. The EU strongly supports the children and armed conflict mandate and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. We also support the implementation of resolution 2601 (2021) in order to protect schools from attack and mitigate and avoid the military use of schools, and we welcome the efforts of United Nations States Members that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration.

The EU remains committed to the protection of women and girls and to supporting the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as to addressing its impact on sexual and reproductive health. Persons with disabilities face additional risks and vulnerabilities in situations of armed conflict. Their needs should be duly taken into account, and barriers to access, information evacuation and emergency assistance should be lifted.

Finally, the EU concurs with the report of the Secretary-General that securing rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access is of the utmost importance. We are committed to avoiding any potential negative impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian action. People impacted by armed conflict deserve our concrete actions to protect their lives and dignity.

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

Mr. Rae (Canada): First of all, on behalf of my Government and the people of Canada, I would like to express our deep sorrow over the events that took place yesterday in Texas. The United States, its delegation and you, Mr. President, are very much in our thoughts and prayers.

(spoke in French)

I thank the United States for hosting today's open debate, and the presenters for sharing their views with us.

The Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians (S/2022/381) presents some very disturbing trends. There are more conflicts today than since the end of the Second World War. Forced displacement, world hunger and humanitarian needs are at their highest levels in many years. And violence against civilians and civilian infrastructure is increasing — and becoming more deadly.

(spoke in English)

Tragically, we are witnessing this daily in Ukraine, where there is still no end in sight to the horrors of what has been dubbed the Russian war machine or the "atrocities factory", as one scholar has called it. The Russian Federation's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine has cast a glaring spotlight on two problems undermining the protection of civilians in armed conflict — first, the abuse of the veto power and, secondly, the glaring lack of accountability for violations of international law.

We all know the first line of the Charter of the United Nations. But today, despite that promise to "save succeeding generations", this generation is suffering from the scourge of war. And it is the civilian population — children, women and men — who bear the brunt of armed conflict. That is why we have to look at the peace and security architecture of the United Nations, including the Security Council veto.

The recent resolution adopted by the General Assembly opens the door for greater — and needed — scrutiny of every veto and will give all Member States the opportunity to consider recommendations for collective measures, instead of a blocked Security Council.

When armed conflict does arise, the laws of war are uncontroversial — they protect those who are not or are no longer taking part in hostilities. And they

prohibit means and methods of warfare that cause unnecessary suffering. Were parties to armed conflict to scrupulously follow the law, we would not be discussing humanitarian access and, most important, the vast majority of harm to civilians and civilian objects would be avoided.

Yet we continue to witness these violations — in Ukraine, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Myanmar and in many other places. Deliberate attacks on hospitals, schools, homes and essential infrastructure have become all too familiar, carrying with them devastating effects, particularly for women, children and the disabled — those least able to take care of themselves. Non-compliance and a lack of accountability mean there is less space for humanitarian actors.

Sometimes our instinct in response to these horrors is to do something — adopt a resolution, create new laws. But I wonder if that is really the right approach.

First, we must examine ourselves. What are we doing to make sure that international humanitarian law — the protocols and conventions that we adopted — are actually now built into our domestic laws, what we do nationally and what are practices really are?

Secondly, we have to make sure that there is scrupulous adherence to international humanitarian law by our State and non-State partners.

Thirdly, when parties to armed conflict commit serious violation, we must hold them to account — diplomatically, through collective sanctions; militarily, by supporting Governments, like Ukraine, that are defending themselves under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations; and legally, through prosecution at the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice and other bodies.

(spoke in French)

Our solidarity is our strength. We must collectively build a stronger incentive structure for compliance with international law and strengthen the Council's two-decade-old architecture for the protection of civilians.

In Ukraine, our solidarity has translated into unprecedented sanctions against the Government of the Russian Federation and a willingness to hold its forces accountable for clear violations of international law.

There should be no place in the world where the most serious violations of international law can be committed with impunity.

(spoke in English)

Russia's unprovoked and illegal actions in Ukraine shock the conscience of humankind. But its horrific conduct has reinforced our collective will to defend the very international order that it is attempting to undermine. And we must use the same collective will to protect those who are suffering in conflicts around the world at the hands of too many, whose actions — in flagrant violations of the rules of war and humanity — continue with little accountability.

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

Ms. Baptista Grade Zacarias (Portugal): Portugal aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the European Union (EU), on behalf of the EU and its member States; Switzerland, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict; and Croatia, on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

We thank the United States for organizing this debate and would like to add three points in our national capacity.

First, this discussion is essential, given the number of conflicts causing unspeakable suffering to civilians across the globe. Deliberate attacks against civilians constitute war crimes and, in some cases, crimes against humanity. They cannot go unpunished and demand accountability following investigations initiated by national or international institutions.

In that context, I would like to reaffirm Portugal's support for the International Criminal Court and for the call for the universal ratification of the Rome Statute. I also wish to reiterate our full support for the international human rights protection system, while underlining its critical role in ensuring accountability for human rights violations and abuses, as well as stressing the importance of early-warning mechanisms.

The prevention of human rights violations should be everyone's priority. We therefore welcome the prevention focus of the New Agenda for Peace set out in *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982) and look forward to the next steps in that regard.

Secondly, like others, we remain concerned about the disproportionate use of explosive weapons in populated areas and their impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure. We support the ongoing process developing a political declaration on the subject. We think of Syria and Ukraine. We think of Afghanistan, where last year more than 900 schools were destroyed, damaged or closed, with their rehabilitation hampered by the presence of explosive hazards. That figure is staggering and puts the future of entire generations at risk while disproportionately affecting girls. It reminds us of the need to implement resolution 2601 (2021), on safeguarding the right to education, and resolution 2573 (2021), on critical civilian infrastructure, among other resolutions.

Thirdly, we note with concern the numbers on conflict-driven hunger. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, a global breadbasket, is further disrupting commodity supply chains, contributing to a rise in food market prices and, by the same token, food insecurity across the world. That aggravates the humanitarian situation in the most vulnerable regions, such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, which already have to deal with conflict, the pandemic and climate change, in addition to poverty and inequality. Such global, interconnected challenges demand a strong multilateral response. The recently created Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance has a key role to play. We support it and look forward to its continued work. We have the instruments. We must use them, including in the Security Council. Full compliance with international humanitarian law, from all parties to conflicts, including non-State armed groups, must remain our guiding star across the board.

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

Ms. Oehri (Liechtenstein): I thank you, Mr. President, for holding this year's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in circumstances that unfortunately could not be more apposite.

Conflict continues to destroy essential infrastructure and other civilian objects and cause extreme civilian harm. After more than a decade of war in Syria, widespread damage to water systems has left civilians with 40 per cent less drinking water than 10 years ago, and more than half of the population is suffering from hunger. The war in Ukraine has had

devastating humanitarian effects, with 1.4 million people without access to running water and an alarming increase in food insecurity not only felt by the people of Ukraine — one of the world's largest grain producers — but by many around the globe. We condemn the Russian forces' attacks on civilians and civilian objects, such as hospitals, schools, apartment buildings and shelters. International humanitarian law makes it extremely clear that such attacks on civilian infrastructure, whether carried out kinetically or with cyber weapons, are illegal. They are war crimes and must be investigated and prosecuted as such, including by the International Criminal Court when national judiciaries are unwilling or unable to do so themselves. Liechtenstein also supports Council action to address the growing impact of conflict on infrastructure, building on resolution 2573 (2021).

We are heartbroken and outraged that atrocities continue to be committed in conflicts around the world, but we must not be discouraged. This tragic state of affairs requires our collective persistence in ensuring accountability through international, regional, national and hybrid regimes in order to bring justice to the victims of these crimes and deter their commission in future. In that regard, Liechtenstein will continue to advocate consistently for a comprehensive, impartial and sustainably funded system of international justice for the most serious international crimes.

Conflict also has a lasting effect on mental health. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381), more than one in five people living in conflict-affected areas were estimated to be suffering from depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Trauma is particularly associated with sexual and gender-based violence, which continues to blight many conflicts. While women and girls are disproportionately affected, the pathbreaking research by the All Survivors Project highlights the devastating impact of sexual and gender-based violence on men and boys — an often-overlooked issue — as well as the need to provide relevant assistance and support to all victims and survivors.

Climate change is costing lives, exacerbating vulnerabilities and inequalities, and is a driver of conflict as well as a matter of human security itself. It is therefore vital to ensure that humanitarian action is environmentally sustainable, limiting potential damage to the planet. As an expression of our appreciation of the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC) in that regard, Liechtenstein has supported the ICRC Climate and Environment Transition Fund, which will enable it to transition towards sustainable and climate-smart humanitarian action in conflict. We are hopeful that other relevant actors on the ground will follow suit.

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

Ms. Schwalger (New Zealand): I would like to thank our briefers from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Rescue Committee, as well as Ms. Boketa, of Women for Women International.

This annual debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict is one of the most important topics on the Council's thematic agenda. Unfortunately, we live in a world where conflicts continue to take a devastating toll on civilians. Our daily news feeds have stories of civilians targeted in conflict zones from Afghanistan to Ethiopia, Ukraine to Syria. Civilian deaths, psychological trauma, sexual violence and family separations are only some of the wounds that will take generations to heal. Today's debate takes place against a backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That unprovoked and unjustified aggression has caused unbearable heartache and forced 12 million Ukrainians to flee their homes. It has threatened the unthinkable — nuclear conflict.

In conflict, civilians pay the highest price. As the Secretary-General (S/2022/381) notes in his report, in 2021 the United Nations reported more than 11,000 civilian deaths across 12 armed conflicts. Health-care personnel, medical facilities and civilian infrastructure were directly targeted, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. As our briefers have noted, we continue to see attacks on health-care workers, with 219 deaths in 2021 alone. We also continue to see a lack of respect for international humanitarian law. That is unacceptable. Even war has rules. Listening to our briefers, we took away three key areas where we should redouble our efforts to reverse those terrible trends.

First, we need greater determination from the Council in discharging its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. Russia's abuse of its veto has led to the Council's inaction in the face of an act of aggression. It must avail itself of every possible tool

to prevent conflict, defend fundamental international norms and seek negotiated political solutions.

Secondly, we need all Member States to demand universal compliance with international law from both State and non-State actors. We should support all efforts to reinforce that compliance, including the draft political declaration strengthening the protection of civilians from the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which New Zealand encourages all States to support. We must also ensure that those who are responsible for violations of international law and international humanitarian law face justice, by deploying the accountability mechanisms we have at our disposal. The erosion of international rules must not be allowed to become our new normal. Council resolutions that were agreed on in order to protect civilians must not become rhetorical commitments.

Thirdly, the Security Council should prioritize the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operation mandates. Member States should provide trained personnel and resources to support those mandates. Early warning of threats to civilians and mechanisms that provide for timely and effective responses must be a baseline requirement for peacekeeping missions. Improved integration with the United Nations peacebuilding architecture would better protect civilians at all stages of conflict.

During New Zealand's most recent term on the Security Council, we worked with four elected members to secure the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), in response to the horrific escalation in attacks against medical facilities and personnel in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and beyond. It was an important reaffirmation of our collective commitment to uphold international law in the face of such atrocities. It was also a demonstration of the important role elected members of the Council play in advancing the protection of civilians in the work of the Council.

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

Ms. Lõuk (Estonia): We thank the United States for hosting today's debate, and the briefers for their presentations.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

The protection of civilians is an essential part of the Security Council's agenda. With an overwhelming majority of harm caused by conflicts borne by civilians, we cannot address the maintenance of international peace and security without a strong focus on their protection in every conflict.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381) yet again reflects an enormous gap between the parties' obligations under international law and the reality in situations of conflict around the world. Estonia reiterates its call for compliance with international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We underline that existing international law also applies in cyberspace.

With tens of thousands of civilians in need of assistance, we find the persistent and increasing attacks against those who strive to help them — humanitarian and health-care workers — abhorrent. Hundreds of health-care workers were killed and facilities were damaged in 2021 — a number that will increase exponentially this year due to the attacks conducted systematically and ruthlessly by Russia in Ukraine. Scores of humanitarian workers have been killed, wounded or kidnapped, 95 per cent of them national staff — most notably in Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Syria. The civilian toll continues to include dozens of killed and injured journalists, whose work adds to the information and awareness of the impact of conflict.

We welcome the focus of today's debate on ways to ensure better humanitarian access. We note with concern the various emerging challenges outlined by the Secretary-General, including restrictions of the activities of female humanitarian personnel, who are essential in reaching those most vulnerable, as well as the fragmentation of armed groups and the difficulties for humanitarian engagement resulting from the growing number of private military and security contractors, in particular in the Central African Republic. We also note the increasing risk borne by local humanitarian workers due to the increased risks associated with humanitarian operations.

The denial of humanitarian access is a violation of international law. Increased and consistent Council scrutiny, enhanced data collection, monitoring and reporting and ensuring accountability for violations are key tools for countering the obstacles to humanitarian access. Estonia underlines the importance of, and continues to focus on, the contribution of digital

technologies to the identification and assessment of humanitarian needs. However, we take note of the Secretary-General's emphasis on the need to adopt strategies to address their malicious use in undermining humanitarian action.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has been carried out with cynical indifference towards the protection of civilians. It has been characterized by violations of international law amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity; targeted systematic violence against the most vulnerable, including women and children; and extensive shelling and sieges of cities. It has led to millions being displaced and thousands being deported, disappeared, tortured or subjected to sexual violence.

It has also been characterized by massive disinformation, including here at the Council, about the Russian actions towards the civilians in Ukraine and their inhuman intent, as well as cynical and surreal attempts by Russia to claim that its actions comply with international law.

Estonia has continued to emphasize the importance of accountability for all violations of international law through national, regional, international and hybrid mechanisms. That includes the investigation of, and full accountability for, the Russian crimes in Ukraine. We commend the tireless efforts of humanitarian organizations, in particular local organizations, as well as the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, in working to ensure humanitarian access and deliver assistance to those people in dire need. We underline the need for safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Ukraine.

The Security Council needs to step up its action to protect civilians everywhere, including by showing political will and providing adequate protection capacity for its peacekeeping and political missions. Otherwise, it will continue to fall short of the aims set for its role in the Charter of the United Nations.

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

Mr. Marschik (Austria): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting as an open debate and for allowing us to participate. I also thank the briefers for their stirring presentations, and the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2022/381) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Austria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and the statement made by representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

We say it over and over again: civilians must not be targets in armed conflicts. And yet we see it over and over again: civilians are targeted. Women, men, children and civilian infrastructure are targeted. That is done not just through negligence; all too often, that targeting is fully deliberate and intentional.

A case in point is Russia's illegal war in Ukraine, where shelling of civilians and civilian infrastructure occurs daily, in clear violation of international humanitarian law but also in violation of Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians. We join those who say that needs to stop, in Ukraine and in all other parts of the world.

One of the biggest causes of civilian harm is the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. In such cases, civilian casualties amount to almost 90 per cent of casualties, with long-term effects on mental health, infrastructure and supply chains. We say it again and again: full compliance with international humanitarian law is essential. To underline that, Austria has been a staunch supporter of the process to elaborate a strong political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It is high time we adopt it.

In the concept note for today's debate, you asked us, Sir, what actions could be undertaken to strengthen the protection of civilians in a comprehensive manner. In our eyes, the answer is not too complicated.

First, we must all ensure and enable the full, continuous and effective implementation of Security Council resolutions by all Member States.

Secondly, if those resolutions or key norms of international relations, such as international humanitarian law, are violated, we need decisive and swift responses by the Council to immediately counter such violations.

Thirdly, we must ensure accountability for such violations. In that respect, Austria reiterates the importance of effective and context-specific training in international humanitarian law, as well as appropriate guidance at all levels of military operations — strategic, operational and tactical — in order to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. Security Council resolutions in previous years have covered a wide

range of issues in the context of protecting civilians, focusing on persons with disabilities, the protection of medical personnel, missing persons or the protection of indispensable civilian infrastructure. Fully implementing those resolutions, including by ensuring swift, safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian workers to areas of concern, would go a long way to improving the fate of civilians in conflicts around the world.

As the Secretary-General mentioned in his report, the cycle between armed conflict and hunger persists. Food must never become a weapon of war, because it always targets civilians. The deliberate creation of food insecurity, just like deliberate climate insecurity, aggravates an armed conflict, turning it into a global threat.

Finally, we must also think about public perception. In matters of peace and security around the world, the public expects the United Nations to act. When civilians are harmed in large numbers, wherever that may be, the Security Council cannot remain silent. The Council must speak up, stop the activities causing harm and help bring the perpetrators to justice. The Council owes that to the thousands of civilian casualties whom we witness every year.

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

Mr. Chatrnúch (Slovakia): We greatly appreciate the holding of this open debate on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which continues to be very worrying. The Secretary-General underlined in his report (S/2022/381) that armed conflicts continue to be characterized by high levels of civilian death, injury and psychological trauma, sexual violence, torture and forced disappearances, as well as damaged and destroyed homes, schools, hospitals and essential civilian infrastructure. Moreover, an already unfavourable general situation has been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease pandemic, which is totally unacceptable.

Slovakia would like to take this opportunity to express its strong commitment to international humanitarian law and the principles it is founded on. Respect for international humanitarian law is an irreplaceable tool for the effective protection of civilians in armed conflicts. We must ramp up our efforts to prevent, minimize and mitigate the adverse impact of military operations on civilian populations in

order to protect them from violence. That approach must be based on the fundamental understanding that the protection of civilians is an obligation of all the parties to a conflict. They must distinguish between civilians and combatants and civilian and military objects and ensure that attacks are proportionate and necessary.

Slovakia, together with 113 other States, has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. Access to a safe and quality education is a fundamental right of every person, and the right to education is crucial to personal development and prosperity. It responds to multiple needs and offers protection and hope for a better future. We are appalled that attacks on education continued to rise in 2021 and strongly condemn attacks on students, teachers, schools and universities. We likewise call on all Member States to endorse and implement the Declaration.

Last but not least, I want to once again condemn the Russian Federation's unjustified and unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine, in blatant violation of international law. Its impact is being felt by undernourished victims across Africa and the Middle East, and the ripple effect will only widen until Russia stops this senseless war. Low supplies and skyrocketing prices are directly affecting dozens of countries, many of which were already food-insecure before the war started. And, as we know, hunger is not only the consequence of conflict — it is often its cause. We are already seeing increased social tensions in middle- and low-income countries, where civilians pay the highest prices for food and energy shortages. The aggressor to blame for this situation is clear. Slovakia recently joined Canada, 39 other Member States and the European Union in calling on Russia to respect and comply with the order of the International Court of Justice of 16 March on preliminary measures and to immediately suspend its military operations in Ukraine. We reiterate our firm call on it to do so without further delay.

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

Ms. Bassols Delgado (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's meeting.

Spain aligns itself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union.

Last year, 11,075 civilians died in 12 conflicts around the world. That figure represents an increase of

17 per cent from 2020, although the unverified figures are much higher. We are witnessing a proliferation of conflicts, of violence against civilians as well as other forms of violence, and that has resulted in escalating levels of vulnerability for millions of people in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Myanmar, and now Ukraine. In accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations and the Security Council must implement the triple nexus in the initiatives they adopt to prevent cycles of violence, reduce their impact and scale, and limit the time frame in which they are developed, in addition to protecting civilians, especially women and girls, young children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

The illegal and unjustified aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which Spain firmly condemns, has once again demonstrated the enormous vulnerability of the civilian population. It has also made clear that disinformation and misinformation violate the rights of a civilian population that is also dealing with a denial of those same violations. It is therefore essential to demand respect for human rights, the rights of refugees and international humanitarian law. When those are seriously violated, we must strengthen investigation and accountability mechanisms. Spain is a staunch supporter of the fight against impunity. There can be no sustainable peace over time without justice and without respect for human rights and the international obligations of international law, including international humanitarian law. Spain has supported the request for an investigation by the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and the establishment of a Human Rights Council commission of inquiry into violations committed during Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

I would like to briefly mention four of Spain's priorities for the protection of civilians agenda. First is the protection of health in armed conflict. Just yesterday we attended the presentation of the report entitled *Unrelenting Violence: Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2021*, which offered devastating data on attacks and destruction of health systems around the world. Three quarters of Tigray's health facilities have been destroyed. The public health system in Myanmar collapsed in the first quarter of 2021. Since February, Russia has been attacking hospitals, ambulances and clinics. The World Health Organization has confirmed 200 Russian attacks. All of that took place in a year

when health was compromised by the coronavirus disease pandemic. Spain therefore urges all parties to conflicts to comply with resolution 2286 (2016).

Secondly, turning to the protection of education, we must work together to prevent attacks on educational facilities and their use for military purposes. Such attacks increased by 20 per cent in 2021. The Safe Schools Declaration and its guidelines, together with Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), are essential to protecting a specific sector of the civilian population — boys and girls. Attacks on schools and universities have also had a significant gender impact. Girls and teachers continue to be at increased risk of having their rights violated.

Thirdly, turning to the protection of the rights of women and girls, in particular the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, Spain has allocated a very high percentage of its humanitarian budget for Ukraine to gender programmes, in collaboration with UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UN-Women. Unfortunately, sexual violence as a tactic of war and a form of torture and repression is still used today. There are no verifiable statistics on such violations due to the stigma related to that act of aggression itself. A shift in focus is therefore necessary, because sexual assaults exist even where there are no complaints. We must be proactive in protecting women and girls.

Fourthly and lastly, turning to humanitarian access and the protection of humanitarian workers, Spain supports principled humanitarian action. We urge all parties to armed conflicts to respect rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access. Health-care workers should not be exposed to risk when protecting and assisting vulnerable populations. I wish to take this opportunity to thank humanitarian workers for their tireless efforts to bring humanity into devastated areas.

We have a mature legal framework for the protection of rights, as well as a shared protection agenda. The real challenge is in the implementation. National and international courts must be a real instrument of implementation, providing effective prevention against and condemnation of attacks on the civilian population. Spain encourages the Security Council to use the instruments at its disposal, including the referral of reports of war crimes and crimes against humanity to the International Criminal Court for investigation and eventual judgment.

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

Mr. Fifield (Australia): Australia welcomes this year's annual debate on the protection of civilians. We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/381).

It is clear that, despite the existing legal framework supporting the protection of civilians in armed conflict, respect for international law continues to be flouted. Every day we are confronted with fresh examples of egregious violations of the international legal rules protecting civilian populations. As we have seen with Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and its wanton disregard for the protection of Ukrainian civilians, conflict is ruinous to societies and generates irrevocable trauma.

Civilians are adversely impacted by conflict on a daily basis in many parts of the world: Ukraine, Syria, Ethiopia, Yemen, South Sudan and many more places. And beyond the terrible harm inflicted upon civilians caught up in conflict, those situations also grievously undermine fundamental human rights. We unequivocally support measures to promote full compliance with international humanitarian law, especially in relation to the protection of civilians. We must hold to account those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes in order to ensure justice and deter future perpetrators.

National prosecutions and those by the International Criminal Court, which are complementary to national jurisdictions, play a critical role. Today's report highlights the disturbing trend in obstructing the free passage and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need, as well as deliberate attacks against humanitarian workers. In northern Ethiopia, delays in delivering humanitarian assistance and attacks on humanitarian workers have contributed to a growing humanitarian crisis, with 9.4 million people now in need of assistance. That number should not just roll off the tongue.

Similarly, in South Sudan, attacks on humanitarian workers have prevented life-saving assistance from reaching people in need. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict and violence. Protecting the human rights of women and girls in humanitarian crises is essential. That includes accountability for perpetrators of any form of violence, the appointment of gender advisers, the appointment of women protection advisers and women's participation

and leadership at all stages and levels of conflict resolution and peace processes.

Another serious element of the challenges we face is to better understand how misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are used to inflame conflict and how they heighten the risk of violence towards civilians and humanitarian staff. Australia welcomes constructive thinking. It welcomes constructive ideas on how the multilateral system can better intercept and counter those insidious and destructive tools of conflict.

Peace operations play an important role in protecting civilians by creating more stable conditions for physical protection, intercommunal dialogue and the protection of human rights, as well as by contributing to processes of accountability within judicial systems. The credibility and legitimacy of United Nations peace operations largely depend on the willingness and capability of peacekeepers to act when civilians are under threat. Peacekeepers must be empowered and supported by both the United Nations and troop-contributing countries to protect civilians. That includes being equipped to understand and identify the early-warning signs of heightened risks to civilians of the commission of mass atrocity crimes.

Ultimately, we as a global community must work to ensure that human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law are enforced and that accountability measures ensure justice and deter future perpetrators.

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

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): At the outset, we wish to express our heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of the United States and the families of the victims for the tragic event that occurred in Texas yesterday.

We thank the United States for convening this open debate. Today's meeting, although an annual one, takes on new urgency when global efforts for the protection of civilians are facing unprecedented challenges. Conflicts and security threats are raging at a broader scale, from Europe to Africa. Civilians, including women and children, continue to account for the majority of casualties in armed conflicts. The coronavirus disease pandemic is still raging across countries in conflict situations in which health-care services are minimal.

On top of the perennial hardship in terms of humanitarian needs, the daily lives of, and assistance to, tens of millions of people are threatened with serious food insecurity and disruptions in supply chains, as the Security Council discussed in detail last week (see S/PV.9036). That in turn compounds the fragilities of economic recovery for many. Urgent crises now have to compete for the already scarce resources for humanitarian assistance.

In the face of such unprecedented difficulties, important principles must be ensured. Stronger emphasis must be put on compliance by all parties with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law. It is crucial to uphold the principles of humanitarian assistance and support the sovereignty and primary responsibility of States in protecting their civilians.

All parties to armed conflicts must fully refrain from attacking civilians and critical civilian infrastructure. In times of scarcity and major hardship, it is also critical to galvanize integrated support and synergy from various actors, ranging from regional and non-governmental organizations to the private sector.

The international community must take immediate measures in the short run. Both the parties to conflicts and international partners should prioritize the protection of civilians.

Now is the time for sustained political will in that regard, as well as to scale up the provision of humanitarian aid to various conflict zones in order to meet the increasing needs. If we are to alleviate the serious situation detailed in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2022/381), access to assistance must be maintained and should not be politicized. However, none of the measures that I have mentioned can replace the longer-term imperative to resolve disputes peacefully and avoid conflict so as to prevent innocent casualties entirely. It is equally important to support conflict-affected communities, not just in responding to their short-term needs but also in building their resilience and ability to adapt to emerging challenges, including climate-related risks.

In the light of such a challenging undertaking, it is encouraging that the Security Council, as one of the primary organs of the United Nations, continues to engage regularly on the issue of the protection of civilians and has made it a key element of its thematic and country-specific discussions. The Council should

fully discharge its functions as the primary body for maintaining international peace and security in order to better respond to the growing challenges, and it should actively promote efforts to resolve and prevent conflicts. Another way to better protect civilians is to expand discussions and adopt measures on specific and important aspects related to their protection, such as critical infrastructure, mine action and food and water security, as well as on facilitating the life-saving activities of humanitarian agencies and protecting humanitarian workers. Messages of unity from the Council are equally important.

My country understands the consequences of war first-hand and fully empathizes with the plight of the civilians who are suffering as a result of armed conflicts around the world. We ourselves have placed a high priority on post-conflict reconstruction and tackling the consequences of war in order to promote socioeconomic development for our people and protect them from risks such as explosive remnants of war. Viet Nam was pleased to facilitate the adoption last year of resolution 2573 (2021), pursuant to which the Secretary-General's latest report discusses issues related to the protection of civilian infrastructure. We remain committed to joining future efforts to ensure the protection of civilians.

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

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to thank the United States for convening this open debate, and the speakers from the International Committee of the Red Cross, Women for Women International, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Rescue Committee for their valuable briefings.

As we meet today, many existing conflicts persist while new ones are emerging, with grave consequences for civilians, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report to the Council (S/2022/381). The effects of conflict are not limited to the regions where the violence occurs. Beyond threatening the lives and safety of civilians, conflicts can also have other negative repercussions. They can cause displacement, refugee crises and negative economic effects, as well as worsening threats to food security, which is already at risk thanks to the effects of climate change and the supply-chain disruptions resulting from the global pandemic.

The most effective way to spare civilians from the scourge of violence and suffering, including the resulting humanitarian needs, is by preventing conflicts from occurring in the first place and resolving them through peaceful and diplomatic means. In the absence of such solutions, it is essential that all parties to conflict abide by the principles and provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and refrain from targeting civilians and civilian facilities and infrastructure. We also stress the need to make every possible effort to ensure the freedom of civilians and guarantee them rapid and unimpeded access to the humanitarian and emergency aid they need. That requires facilitating the work of medical and humanitarian workers and providing them with security and protection. Unfortunately, hundreds of those workers continue to suffer unjustifiable violence.

There are other categories of civilians targeted by violence in conflict situations who must also be protected. According to UNESCO, 20 journalists were killed in conflict-affected countries in 2021. The State of Qatar condemns in the strongest terms the assassination by the Israeli occupation forces of the Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh, as well as the wounding of a producer, Ali Samoudi. They were working, wearing gear clearly marked "press", when they were attacked. That is a heinous crime, a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and a blatant infringement of freedom of the press, freedom of expression and of all people's right to obtain information. We reiterate the Security Council members' call for an immediate, thorough, transparent, fair and impartial investigation and for accountability for the perpetrators.

The right to education, which continues to suffer from unacceptable violations in conflict situations, including when educational institutions are the target of attacks, must be ensured. In that regard, we recall the importance of implementing General Assembly resolution 74/275, submitted by the State of Qatar, which urges the parties to armed conflict to protect civilians, including students and education workers, and to protect educational institutions.

The State of Qatar is anxious to alleviate the impact of humanitarian crises on civilians affected by armed conflict, and we therefore continue to play a leading role in providing development and relief assistance and supporting the efforts of the United Nations in that regard. The State of Qatar is among the

top 10 contributors to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We have provided support for humanitarian efforts in many Arab countries and contributed more than \$18 million to the Central Emergency Response Fund. We also continue to provide humanitarian and development support to our brother Palestinian people, especially in order to alleviate the difficult conditions and support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip, in addition to our continued contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We are also providing urgent humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, including via an air bridge from Doha to Kabul, as well as working to rehabilitate Kabul airport in order to facilitate the delivery of basic food supplies.

In conclusion, Qatar reiterates its commitment to humanitarian work based on the principles of cooperation, partnership, integrity and impartiality. We will continue to coordinate with our international partners to assess humanitarian situations and provide assistance wherever necessary for the benefit of civilians affected by 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 would like to sincerely thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate to address the urgent need to protect civilians in conflict situations.

It is the responsibility of the international community and the Security Council to take effective measures to protect civilians in cities and displacement camps from acts such as the terrorist attacks being committed by the Iran-backed Houthi militias against civilians and civilian objects in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which constitute a flagrant violation of international law and international humanitarian law. They also represent a real threat to vital civilian infrastructure, energy supplies and global economic stability and undermine regional and international peace and security.

Despite the continuing United Nations truce in Yemen, which is mainly aimed at alleviating the human suffering of Yemenis, the Houthi militias have repeatedly violated the truce in the city of Ma'rib, with a population of 4 million people, more than 2 million of whom are displaced. They have also committed violations in the Al-Hudaydah, Dhale and Hajjah governorates, among others. Those are some

of the most prominent examples of how the lives and safety of civilians are being endangered in a situation of conflict. The Houthi militias continue to target civilians and civilian objects with ballistic missiles, drones and other heavy weapons, leaving dozens dead and hundreds injured, most of them women and children, and destroying schools, hospitals and places of worship. In addition, they are recruiting children at so-called summer camps, brainwashing them with ideas of hatred and extremism and throwing them into battle. All of that is in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and all international norms. The Houthi crimes against civilians have extended to taking the population as hostages in entire cities and villages, using them as human shields, using schools as weapon stores and systematically sniping at civilians.

Those militias also continue to besiege cities, denying the population freedom of movement or access to water and food and using starvation as a method of warfare. Protecting civilians in Taiz from bombardment and the continued seven-year Houthi siege is a humanitarian priority. The Yemeni Government has worked to implement its obligations under the Stockholm Agreement, which included provisions for starting consultations to lift the siege; however, the Houthi militias have continued their fierce campaign against the city's residents.

Today, nearly two months after the start of the truce sponsored by the United Nations, which again included engaging in consultations to lift the siege of the city, those militias continue to disavow their commitments and use human suffering as a means of political gain.

We reiterate the need for the international community and the Security Council to find a way to lift the siege of Taiz; open the crossings; end the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of individuals and goods urgently and unconditionally; ensure humanitarian access to those in need; and stop the obstruction perpetrated by Houthi militias, their interference in the work of international organizations and their diversion of the flow of aid away from those who deserve it. We also reiterate the importance of transparently reporting on those violations.

Mines represent one of the most serious dangers facing civilians in conflict areas in Yemen, which signed the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty in 1997 and destroyed its stocks of that terrible weapon. The Houthi militias have manufactured nearly 2 million mines and

explosive devices and deployed them in more than one of the areas of Yemen that they control, leading to the subsequent deaths and injury of thousands of civilian victims, especially among women and children.

While civilians have attempted to benefit from the window of hope offered by the truce, their movement on mine-infested roads between towns and villages has led to a high number of civilian casualties. That weapon paralyzes the movement of Yemenis and threatens the lives of millions of civilians and displaced people, who are trapped between the Houthi bombardment to which they are exposed in cities and camps and the mines laid in their homes, streets, cities, farms and grazing areas, which represent the livelihoods of millions.

Despite the extraordinary efforts of the national army and the Masam project to clear mines, the randomly laid mines and the lack of maps pose a great challenge to those efforts and will remain a threat to the lives of future generations for decades. We call on the Council to take measures to pressure the Houthis and ensure that they hand over all mine maps without delay.

The Iranian regime's supply of weapons, including ballistic missiles, to the Houthis is a clear violation of relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015), and also demonstrates a disregard for the efforts of the international community to maintain regional and international peace and security.

Therefore, the efforts of the Council to end the conflict and protect civilians must be translated into the implementation of its resolutions and the adoption of a decisive approach to deterring and holding accountable the violators of those resolutions and preventing the smuggling of weapons, which are used to prolong the war and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Those weapons impede any progress in the peace process led by the United Nations to end the Yemeni crisis and achieve a just and sustainable peace based on the agreed parameters of the political solution.

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

Mr. Dvali (Georgia): I would like to express our appreciation to the United States presidency for organizing this important open debate. I would also like to thank the briefers for their comprehensive and informative briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and wishes to add the following points in its national capacity.

We are deeply alarmed by the finding in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2022/381) that the civilian population accounts for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflict. Such unlawful attacks against civilians constitute a clear violation of international humanitarian law and the rules-based international order. Georgia actively supports and stresses the importance of the various international initiatives aimed at protecting civilians in armed conflict, including the political declaration on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflict and the Safe Schools Declaration.

As a result of Russia's full-scale military aggression against my country in August 2008, more than 400 civilians and military personnel were killed and more than 1,700 were wounded. Thousands more civilians joined the 500,000 internally displaced persons and refugees who had been expelled from the two integral regions of Georgia during the previous waves of ethnic cleansing. A total of 53 Georgian villages in and around the Tskhinvali region were fully cleansed and destroyed, and 35,000 houses belonging to ethnic Georgians were deliberately burned and ruined.

The security and humanitarian situation in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Russian-occupied regions of Georgia has been deteriorating on a daily basis since 2008, and the list of human rights violations has grown worse. Ethnic discrimination, violations of the right to life, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detentions, kidnappings, restriction of the freedom of movement and infringement of the right to property — those are just part of an incomplete list of violations that people have to endure daily on the other side of the occupation line.

Russia's aggression and its occupation policy, as well as its hybrid methods of warfare, which were well-tested on my country, have unfortunately been applied against Ukraine on a larger scale. Thousands of civilians have been killed or injured. More than 500 schools and 52 hospitals have been shelled and entire cities have been razed to the ground. Haunting images of massacres with large numbers of civilian deaths and casualties, as well as the destruction of civilian infrastructure, show the true face of that brutal aggression.

We call on Russia to comply with the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice of 16 March, which bind Russia to immediately suspend the military operations that it commenced on 24 February 2022 in the territory of Ukraine and withdraw all of its forces and armaments entirely.

We call for ensuring the safe, rapid and unhindered access to populations in need of assistance for medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as the protection of all medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in their duties. In that regard, we reiterate Georgia's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea and Donbas, as well as Ukraine's navigational rights in its territorial waters.

It is vital to safeguard civilians everywhere and ensure that the perpetrators of violations of international law and international humanitarian law are held to account. We stand in solidarity with all those affected by violence and remain committed to contributing to the collective endeavour of ensuring that justice is served.

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

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): We would like to thank the United States for convening this open debate.

South Africa welcomes the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/381), which informs our discussions today. Furthermore, we wish to thank all the briefers for their presentations.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to have impacts on new, ongoing and protracted conflicts, exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities and drawing further attention to protection concerns. We have witnessed escalating humanitarian needs in conjunction with the displacement of persons, disruptions to global supply chains, food insecurity and famine. Vaccines have enabled many parts of the world to bring the pandemic under control, but their distribution remains unequal. It is therefore crucial that urgent measures be taken to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are also made available to those in conflict situations.

Despite being protected under international humanitarian law, civilians, including the most vulnerable — children, women, refugees, displaced and disabled persons, and humanitarian and medical

personnel — continue to be the victims of direct, deliberate, systematic and violent targeted attacks by armed forces. Similarly, access to humanitarian assistance has been compromised by the continued destruction of hospitals and attacks on medical transport and essential services.

We continue to urge for ensuring that objects that are indispensable to civilian populations are protected at all costs, and for the stringent implementation of resolution 2573 (2021), pertaining to attacks on civilian infrastructure, in order to uphold international humanitarian law. Non-combatants, including journalists, must be protected in keeping with the principle of distinction and other protective measures of the Geneva Conventions.

We remain concerned about the continued politicization of humanitarian corridors, with detrimental effects on the civilians most in need of assistance. Yet despite those challenges, humanitarian personnel continue to do their work bravely and provide assistance to the most vulnerable communities. We would like to highlight several areas where the Security Council could assist in strengthening the protection of civilians.

First, where possible, the Security Council and Member States should continue to support non-violent and community-based protection mechanisms such as political mediation, early-warning activities and unarmed civilian protection. The effective protection of civilians begins with safe and inclusive dialogue with conflict-affected communities, States and other stakeholders at all levels. Additionally, grass-roots peacemaking efforts should be promoted, along with the roles that women and young people play in those initiatives.

Secondly, the Council and Member States must fulfil their commitment to the full protection of civilians, including by promoting and implementing the relevant and applicable legal and policy frameworks. It is important to make efforts to ensure accountability for violations, including by condemning those who violate international humanitarian law. We believe that accountability mechanisms at the domestic level are essential, while broader regional and international mechanisms should continue to support them based on the principles of complementarity and subsidiarity.

Finally, we commend the United Nations peacekeeping operations' continued efforts, where

mandated, to protect civilians and promote and protect human rights in situations of armed conflict, in collaboration with host States. Peacekeeping and humanitarian organizations should undertake activities that complement the protection cluster's response. Interaction and dialogue between those various actors are therefore essential to improving and strengthening their respective protection mechanisms.

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

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): I would like to express my appreciation to the delegation of the United States for convening this Security Council open debate on the subject of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I thank today's briefers for outlining the pressing humanitarian challenges and vulnerabilities that persist in various parts of the world.

Given the fact that our human experiences of crises and calamities have enabled us to evolve throughout history, the topic of today's debate is essential to addressing the many challenges and disturbing realities we continue to face. International humanitarian law and international human rights law represent a crucial framework for the effective protection of civilian populations and infrastructure, and in that context we want to emphasize the vital importance of the full and unconditional implementation of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. We condemn violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel and schools and educational institutions, as well as violence, threats and intimidation against journalists and media workers operating in conflict settings. Armenia remains committed to protecting education from attack, in line with the Safe Schools Declaration and the provisions outlined in the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles, which our country has endorsed.

In our part of the world, we continue to face the humanitarian consequences of the premeditated military attack that Azerbaijan openly admitted to initiating in the autumn of 2020, amid the emergence of an unprecedented global health-care crisis that has resulted in thousands of casualties and displacements and the destruction of livelihoods and critical civilian infrastructure. The military aggression against Nagorno Karabakh included extensive, highly disturbing instances of violations of humanitarian law,

as reported and documented by various human rights institutions. In April we circulated the interim report of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Nagorno Karabakh as a document of the Security Council and under the General Assembly agenda items on the prevention of armed conflict; the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; the right of peoples to self-determination; the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The interim report provides evidence of targeted attacks on the civilian population and the various manifestations of Azerbaijan's violations of the rights of the people of Artsakh.

In a report published last week, Amnesty International revealed the magnitude of the attack's disproportionate impact on the older ethnic Armenian population, who were specifically targeted by the Azerbaijani military forces in their commission of war crimes, including extrajudicial killings and torture of detainees. The systematic violent acts and provocations aimed at disrupting normal life in the border areas include deliberately setting fire to pastures, indiscriminate shootings, cattle-raiding, disruptions of gas supplies and other forms of hostile conduct intended to intimidate civilians and deprive them of their basic human rights. It has been equally disturbing to see the attempts to instrumentalize the issue of prisoners of war and civilian captives, whose return Azerbaijan continues to deny, in violation of the Geneva Conventions and in defiance of the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice as a matter of urgency on 7 December 2021. These persistent aggressive actions, accompanied by violent rhetoric using open military threats, distorted interpretations of history, incessant territorial claims and manipulative reversals of agreed commitments, should be a matter of concern for the international community.

The obstruction of safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations agencies to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict zone continues to undermine efforts to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the needs of the civilian population and create a long-term humanitarian response to them. In delivering relief and assistance in situations where the right to life and human dignity are under imminent threat, it remains a critical priority for the United Nations system to adequately address in a timely manner the issue of humanitarian

access to people on the ground, without discrimination and by ensuring that no one is left behind.

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

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank the United States for convening this important meeting. I would also like to thank the briefers and pay tribute to the continuing efforts to protect civilians under the leadership of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The global trend on the protection of civilians is disturbing. Conflict continues to cause civilian deaths and injuries, sexual violence, family separations and disappearances. The safety of medical and humanitarian personnel and their facilities remains at high risk. The Security Council must use the full extent of its influence to facilitate the implementation of the relevant resolutions and ensure that the key provisions of international humanitarian law are respected. While there may be some room to improve the monitoring and reporting of humanitarian access, there are no easy practical solutions or mechanisms that can effectively counter the systematic denial of such access by parties to ongoing conflicts, who rarely agree to or respect unimpeded access.

Achieving a ceasefire in Ukraine is of the utmost importance. In view of the intolerable civilian suffering in Ukraine, Russia must immediately cease its hostilities and fully implement General Assembly resolution ES-11/2, adopted on 24 March, and the relevant Human Right Council resolutions. Since the invasion, Japan's emergency humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and neighbouring countries amounts to \$200 million in total. Japan will continue to stand by the people of Ukraine.

Countering the obstruction of humanitarian access is crucial, but it is not enough. The international community should act in a timely manner to allow humanitarian access to surge once the obstacles to that access have been cleared.

Following the agreement of the first nationwide truce in six years in Yemen, on 10 May Japan decided to provide \$10 million through the World Food Programme in response to the food crisis in the country. That assistance is expected to make a big difference against the backdrop of rising food prices.

In support of the internally displaced persons affected by conflict in northern Ethiopia, Japan provided \$12.4 million in December 2021, as soon as the access to humanitarian assistance had been improved.

Japan is determined to continue making every effort for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We will 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 Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by thanking the United States Security Council presidency for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also thank the briefers for their interventions.

Today's meeting is very timely, as it comes in the context of a highly turbulent international situation of concern to us all, which requires all stakeholders to promote and ensure full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Since its adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which brought the protection of civilians onto its agenda, the Council's actions have undoubtedly strengthened the protection of civilians in armed conflict framework and saved many lives. However, a review of the situation regarding the protection of civilians shows that they continue to account for the great majority of casualties in armed conflict.

In addition to the devastating repercussions of the pandemic, the international community faces political, economic, security, environmental, health, humanitarian and other crises. Unfortunately, in the context of ongoing armed conflicts, almost all of those crises are coming to a head at the same time.

Another obstacle to the protection of civilians is the spread of armed conflict, the parties to which are often violent extremist groups or non-State armed groups that carry out brutal attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure. As a result, today's modern conflicts are complex, ever-changing and fragmented. Allow me now to highlight the following relevant points.

First, we reiterate that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of States. Nevertheless, it is clear that periods of conflict can render some States'

capabilities insufficient or even non-existent. In such cases, it is imperative for the United Nations system to play an important role in supporting Member States within the framework of its mandate and ongoing peacekeeping operations. Similarly, the mandates for such operations should include an adequate protection system and tools for ensuring that civilians are not targeted by armed groups.

Secondly, when it comes to the protection of civilians, there must be a clear separation between humanitarian actions and political objectives and civilians must be protected from being instrumentalized by any party to the conflict.

Thirdly, protecting humanitarian personnel and ensuring the effective delivery of humanitarian aid to the populations most in need is essential.

Fourthly, Morocco firmly condemns the targeting of civilian populations and infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, and stresses the need for the full and effective implementation of relevant Council resolutions in that regard.

Fifthly, all parties must respect international humanitarian law, fulfil their obligations to protect civilians and guarantee access to and delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need. There is a vital need to prevent and address the devastating effects of conflict on civilians, particularly in vulnerable segments of society, while generally speaking there is a need for all parties to conflict, including non-State actors, to comply fully with the norms of international humanitarian law.

Sixthly, accountability for any violations of humanitarian law must continue to be a fundamental part of all strategies for ensuring the protection of civilians.

Finally, integrating the protection of civilians as part of a long-term approach that extends beyond emergency measures would be beneficial. To that end, it remains essential to adopt a preventive approach that intersects systematically with civilian development efforts, in synergy with the phases of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco commends all those responsible for protecting populations in conflict areas for their exemplary work and takes this opportunity to accord them special recognition.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law. However, the international community is bearing witness to non-compliance with international humanitarian law and a lack of accountability for grave violations thereof.

According to the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2022/381), armed conflicts continue to be characterized by high numbers of deaths, injuries and displacements of civilians, as well as significant damage to and deterioration of critical infrastructure for water, sanitation, electricity and health services. Deprivation and hunger also run rampant.

Moreover, medical and humanitarian workers continue to be targeted in different parts of the world.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has also exacerbated human suffering and placed additional strains on already overburdened health-care systems. According to the report, vaccines have helped many parts of the world control the pandemic; however, their distribution remains deeply unequal. Nearly 3 billion people are still waiting for their first shot, many of whom live in conflict areas with weakened health systems.

Climate change has exacerbated conflict-related vulnerabilities, such as food insecurity.

In addition, sanctions on humanitarian activities, including the obstruction of humanitarian access, bring about negative consequences for civilians in need.

Conflicts have had devastating effects on our volatile region of the Middle East, where international humanitarian law is being flagrantly violated. According to the Secretary-General's report, attacks against schools, hospitals, telecommunications infrastructure, roads, factories, houses and other civilian objects in Yemen have resulted in acute food insecurity, which has worsened, with an 8 per cent increase in the number of people in need compared to early 2021.

Similarly, the humanitarian situation in Palestine has deteriorated as a result of the Israeli regime's decades of occupation and apartheid policies. The systematic mass killing of civilians, including women and children, continues, with the occupied Palestinian territory having the highest number of injured health-

care workers in the world. In Gaza, infrastructure has been damaged, and Palestinians have been deprived of basic services due to the illegal blockade.

In Syria, continuing occupation, terrorism and unilateral sanctions have displaced millions of people, damaged infrastructure, limited access to vital resources and disrupted the trade and supply of food and agricultural products. Against that backdrop, I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, humanitarian assistance must not be politicized under any circumstances.

Secondly, it is crucial to provide protection during armed conflicts, particularly for those who are most vulnerable, such as women and children. In that regard, unilateral sanctions, which hamper humanitarian aid delivery in various ways, must be lifted immediately.

Thirdly, all medical and humanitarian personnel must be protected.

Fourthly, it is necessary to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected, particularly the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, which serve as the cornerstone of the legal framework for the protection of civilians.

Fifthly, in order to protect civilians, military intervention, including blockade and foreign occupation, must come to an end. Furthermore, the achievement of a long-term political solution is the only way to keep civilians safe from harm and suffering. In this regard, States must fulfil their obligations under international law to prevent and resolve conflicts peacefully.

Sixthly, it is of paramount importance that the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, demands that the conflicting parties honour their obligations and respect international humanitarian law, in order to spare civilians from further hardships.

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

Ms. Skoczek (Poland): Let me begin by thanking the delegation of the United States for organizing today's important debate and by expressing my appreciation to all the briefers for their interesting and thought-provoking contributions.

Poland aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and by the representative of

Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

A very disturbing picture emerges from the report of the Secretary-General on the state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict in 2021 (S/2022/381). Thousands of civilian deaths and injuries, destroyed homes, attacks on basic civilian infrastructure, refugee crises — these are the horrific consequences of armed conflicts around the world. Poland remains concerned about the harm inflicted on civilians during active hostilities in populated urban areas. Effective protection demands more focus on vulnerable groups, including women, children, youth, persons with disabilities and internally displaced persons, as they suffer most the devastating and disproportionate consequences of armed conflicts.

The Russian war against Ukraine has reminded us that children are always particularly affected during conflicts. In addition to the direct threat to their lives and health and the massive displacement across Ukraine, hundreds of schools have been destroyed or severely damaged by Russian shelling and air strikes. Landmines and explosive remnants of war left behind by Russian troops pose a deadly threat to civilians, including children.

Unfortunately, persons with disabilities caught up in conflict also face multiple obstacles, including limited access to humanitarian assistance, health-care services, education and psychological support. We should use the upcoming third anniversary of resolution 2475 (2019), initiated by Poland and the United Kingdom, to reiterate our commitment to alleviating the suffering of persons with disabilities and to doing better to make sure that they are not discriminated against in any way and that their specific needs are adequately addressed in humanitarian responses.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 100 million people globally have been forced to flee war, violence, persecution and discrimination. It is the highest figure on record. Among them are 14 million people in Ukraine who were forced to flee their homes as a result of the Russian aggression. Within just three months, 8 million persons have been internally displaced, and another 6 million have left Ukraine to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, including Poland, where the number of persons who crossed the Ukrainian-Polish border since 24 February has exceeded 3.4 million.

We support the appeal of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who stated that the number of people displaced globally should serve as a wake-up call for more action to promote peace and address all causes of forced displacement.

We must underline that, under Common Article 1 of the four Geneva Conventions, States parties are obliged to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. Fighting impunity for the violations of international humanitarian law is indispensable to delivering justice to victims. Despite this clear and unconditional international obligation, during the last three months Russia has, by committing war crimes in Ukraine, deliberately created a humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine and blatantly disregarded the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

As the international community, we must ensure that those responsible for these crimes are held accountable. For its part, Poland is cooperating closely with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in the investigation into the situation in Ukraine and is simultaneously carrying out a domestic investigation into Russia's crime of war of aggression against the country, which is subject to penalty under Polish law. In addition, together with Ukraine and Lithuania, we have established a joint investigation team that operates within the framework of the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, in order to collect and preserve evidence of crimes committed in Ukraine.

We call on Russia to abide by the legally binding decision of the International Court of Justice, issued on 16 March, on provisional measures in the case *Ukraine v. Russia*. We welcome the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry on Ukraine by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Our discussion coincides with the sixth anniversary of the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of health care in conflict. During yesterday's side event on practical actions for implementing that resolution, co-organized by Poland, the still existing — and even expanding — gap between the principles and reality was pointed out. We therefore need to enhance our support and advocacy towards full compliance with obligations under international humanitarian law.

In closing, let me emphasize that international humanitarian law is one of the greatest achievements

of the international community in its efforts to reduce the suffering of civilians during armed conflict. But it can only remain to be our common achievement if all of us are respecting its principles, fully complying with its provisions and ensuring accountability for its violations. Poland remains committed to doing its part and to contributing to initiatives and activities aimed at the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

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

Mr. Massari (Italy): Today's open debate comes at a critical point for the protection of civilians. The unjustified and unprovoked aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine has been added to several other ongoing conflicts around the world.

Italy aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and by the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. We also would like to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on the protection of civilians (S/2022/381).

As stated in resolution 2573 (2021), approved only a year ago and co-sponsored by Italy, all parties to armed conflicts should distinguish between civilian populations and objectives, on the one hand, and combatants and military objectives, on the other. Nonetheless, just a few weeks ago, 60 people died in the Luhansk region when a school was bombarded by the Russian army. This is only the most recent example of how cities have sadly become the battlefields of our time and of how civilians and civilian infrastructures are frequently targeted.

We are particularly concerned about the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. We therefore support the ongoing negotiations in Geneva aimed at introducing a political declaration to ban their use.

It is crucial to find ways to guarantee the full respect of international humanitarian law and ensure safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access to populations in need. Too many times have we agreed on universal principles to protect civilians and save lives; we cannot now allow important resolutions to remain empty words. We need to discuss and find practical solutions.

Let me raise three points as food for thought for further reflection. First, if and when the Security

Council is not able to agree on a ceasefire, the United Nations should be able to quickly step in, at least to allow humanitarian corridors and humanitarian access, fully abiding by the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity. In this regard, the evacuation mechanism established in Mariupol, thanks to the coordination efforts of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, is a clear example of how international humanitarian law cannot be left to the mere spontaneous initiative of armed and non-armed groups. Italy supports a more proactive role for the United Nations in fostering international humanitarian obligations and in monitoring their implementation. The addition of a new ad hoc protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions might provide a specific normative framework for a United Nations coordination mechanism focused on humanitarian corridors and humanitarian access. It would also bolster international commitment to the protection of civilians.

Secondly, from a national perspective, it is of paramount importance that the protection of civilians be prioritized in the planning and execution of all military operations and be enshrined in all national military guidelines. Providing combatants with targeted training on humanitarian access and humanitarian corridors can indeed have a positive effect on international humanitarian law compliance.

Thirdly, Italy strongly believes that the presence of female personnel in the military can have a significantly positive impact on the protection of civilians. Women have proved to be successful in fostering trust, which is at the core of agreed humanitarian access and corridors.

Let me conclude by emphasizing a final cornerstone of the protection of civilians: accountability. In that connection, Italy calls on the international community to guarantee accountability for the perpetrators of severe breaches of international humanitarian law. We reaffirm our full support for the work of independent, international and domestic investigative institutions to ensure that there is no impunity.

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

Mr. Rai (Nepal): I begin by thanking the United States presidency for convening today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I thank the briefers for their comprehensive and insightful briefings this morning.

The protection of civilians is at the core of the work and purposes of the United Nations. However, the challenges of protecting civilians will persist as long as protracted conflicts continue, and new conflicts emerge. In past years and recent times, we see a record level of civilian casualties, forced displacement, human rights violations and deprivation.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2022/381) presented a gloomy picture of conflicts in the recent period, which resulted, inter alia, in 11,075 deaths, 84 million people forcibly displaced, 9,797 civilian casualties of explosives alone and 140 million with acute food insecurity.

We must ensure compliance with applicable international law and relevant Security Council resolutions in the conduct of armed conflict, including unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and the protection of forcibly displaced persons, women and children. Well-resourced United Nations peace operations could implement those mandates on the ground.

Devastating distress inflicted upon innocent civilians is deplorable. We strongly condemn indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure by all parties to conflicts. We must end the deliberate targeting of civilians in situations of armed conflict.

The State has the primary responsibility to protect its civilians and prevent violence against them. We must strengthen the capacity of national Governments to implement of international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law if States are to assume that responsibility. We must ensure the primacy of politics and promote preventive diplomacy in order to address the root causes of conflicts.

With its own experience of a nationally led peace process, Nepal underscores the significance of promoting political dialogue, social harmony and understanding for the protection of civilians during conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. The involvement of local community leaders and organizations in peacebuilding is necessary. Investments in education, awareness-raising programmes and employment-generation are critical. Similarly, inclusive and representative State structures help build social justice and enduring peace.

Nepal has always supported the United Nations normative framework aimed at safeguarding and

protecting civilians in armed conflict. Currently, Nepal is the second-largest troop- and police-contributing country in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We provide high-quality predeployment and in-theatre training to our peacekeepers on applicable international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians on the ground.

To deliver the best on the ground, the protection-of-civilians mandate should be treated as a whole-of-mission approach and supported by adequate financial and human resources. We emphasize national ownership and political solutions in order to prevent countries from relapsing to conflict during mission transition and withdrawal.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians during armed conflict is a challenging task for the United Nations. Oftentimes, the success of the United Nations is judged on its ability to protect civilians on the ground. We must ensure that the United Nations succeeds in that responsibility. Nepal is committed to taking up its role as one of the largest troop- and police-contributing countries to do its best to carry out the Council's mandate to protect civilians in conflict areas.

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

Mr. Dvornyk (Ukraine): I recognize the representative of Putin's regime in the permanent seat of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

I would like to thank the United States for organizing this important debate, as well as all briefers for their presentations.

I would also like to express to our friends, the Government and the people of the United States, our sincere condolences over the terrible tragedy in Texas.

Civilians and their rights are among the first to be hit by any war. Now in Ukraine, millions of civilians, Ukrainians and foreigners are struggling — not just for their rights, but also for their lives.

Russian troops continue their indiscriminate attacks on Ukrainian cities, with missile strikes and heavy artillery, including last night's attacks. Tens of thousands of civilians have lost their lives, and many

more are wounded. Nearly 220,000 people have lost their homes. Millions of Ukrainian citizens were forced to flee occupied or war-affected areas. Eight million have become internally displaced, and 6.5 million have left Ukraine as refugees.

This is the worst refugee crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. And we have no doubt that in Russian war strategies this refugee crisis — and food crisis — was envisaged as one of the welcome outcomes. What Russia underestimated was the hospitality, commitment and readiness to help of our neighbours and friends. We reiterate our gratitude to all of them. We also appreciate the good offices of the Secretary-General on humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of civilians from the war-affected areas.

The civilian population of Ukraine in the occupied, and war-affected areas remains extremely vulnerable to the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russian troops on a regular basis — killings, torture and illegal detention, forcible deportation, deprivation of property rights, alarming human rights violations in the occupied territories, attacks against civilian infrastructure throughout Ukraine and expropriation of grain from local farmers. That is not even a complete list of Russian crimes committed against civilians in Ukraine. The abduction of at least 230,000 Ukrainian children, among the 1.4 million Ukrainian citizens forcibly deported to Russia, is a crime aimed at destroying the Ukrainian nation by depriving it of its youth, which is a modern manifestation of colonialism.

Russia attacks Ukrainian civilians deliberately as a part of its Nazi-style war strategy. At the same time, the atrocities are committed by individuals, and every one of them has a name. The day before yesterday a Ukrainian court sentenced Russian serviceman, Vadim Shishimarin, to life imprisonment for the killing of an unarmed civilian in the Sumy region. Yesterday the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine announced that five Russian servicemen and three members of the paramilitary Wagner Group had been identified as suspects of the abduction, torture and killing of the head of the village of Motyzhyn, Kyiv region — Olga Sukhenko, her husband and her son.

We reiterate that those who ordered, committed and whitewashed crimes against civilians will not escape justice. We call on all Member States to engage actively in the process of ensuring justice for all civilians suffering Russia's atrocities.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the United States on its presidency of the Security Council and for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Allow me also to convey our condolences to you, Mr. President, for the tragic loss of lives in Texas. Also, allow me to thank the Secretary-General for both his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2022/381) and his 2018 report on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population (A/ES-10/794), which remains of acute relevance. I would also like to thank the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross for his briefing.

The entire international humanitarian law edifice was built with the primary objective of protecting those who do not take part, or have stopped taking part, in hostilities, and yet in Palestine, those are the primary victims of the Israeli occupation — our civilians, our prisoners, our wounded and our sick.

In the words of the former United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the situation in Palestine is the “most long-standing protection crisis in the United Nations history” — and one might add, with no end in sight.

Every day is a stark reminder that our people are left defenceless in the face of repeated attacks by Israeli occupation forces and settlers. Nowhere are our people safe — not in their homes, not in their schools, not in the streets, not in United Nations buildings and not in hospitals. No one is safe — not a child, not a woman, not a man, not a humanitarian worker, not a farmer and, certainly, as recent events demonstrated, not a journalist.

Shireen dedicated her life to giving a voice to victims until she became one herself. She dedicated her life to telling the stories of Palestinians, and her killing is unfortunately an integral part of the Palestinian story, one of being under threat at any and every point of one’s life and of not finding peace, even in one’s death, as even her funeral was attacked. But it is also a story of the resilience of an entire nation that will not surrender to captivity — the nation that mourned and honoured Shireen in Jerusalem and everywhere.

That insecurity, endured by an entire nation in its flesh, is a direct result of full-scale Israeli impunity. Accountability remains the best form of protection and the most effective deterrent against the targeting of our civilians and the recurrence of crimes.

Israeli leaders, soldiers and settlers know that they enjoy blanket immunity when it comes to their crimes against the Palestinian people. They commit them in broad daylight, shamelessly and repeatedly.

Almost 30 years ago, the Security Council called for the confiscation of the arms of Israeli settlers, with the aim of preventing illegal acts of violence by them, as well as for measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians throughout the occupied territory, including, inter alia, a temporary international or foreign presence. I am referring to resolution 904 (1994).

That resolution, like many others, was never implemented, and even the Temporary International Presence in Hebron/Al-Khalil was expelled by Israel. That is part of the ongoing Israeli war against any witness of its crimes and any effort to bring them to an end. Israel has denied visas to the international staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It has attacked and killed journalists. It has assaulted and killed members of the international solidarity movement. It has arrested and killed human rights defenders and has designated Palestinian non-governmental organizations, including those defending human rights and pursuing accountability, as terrorist organizations.

In 2021, echoing resolution 904 (1994), the General Assembly called for measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians in the occupied territory, and recalled in that regard the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, welcoming his observations, including with respect to the expansion of existing protection mechanisms to prevent and deter violations.

We call on the Secretary-General to implement his proposals without delay, notably by ensuring a more visible and effective international presence on the ground to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people.

While we call for immediate action to avail the Palestinian people the protection to which they are entitled, we stress that the Palestinian people will

be truly safe only once they fulfil their right to self-determination and Israel's illegal occupation is brought to an end.

The calls to uphold international law and the Charter of the United Nations cannot coexist with refusing to hold accountable an Israeli occupation that systematically rewards and shields the killers and accuses and punishes their victims — enough with denied justice, enough with selective justice and enough with delayed justice.

Why would the pursuit of justice be compatible with, and even indispensable to, the pursuit of peace everywhere except in Palestine? Experience has confirmed, including in Palestine, that without justice there can be no peace.

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

Ms. Fatima (Bangladesh): I thank the United States presidency for convening today's debate on this important issue. I also thank the briefers for their insightful presentations.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

The protection of civilians lies at the heart of the work of the United Nations. Yet civilians globally continue to face increased risk due to ongoing conflicts, humanitarian crises and forced displacement, which reached more than 100 million people last week. While responding to such needs, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers face multiple challenges, including attacks against them.

As noted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381), access remains a serious challenge in many parts of the world, where civilians caught up in conflict situations bear the brunt. In that context, this debate is certainly very timely.

The protection of civilians is an important national priority for Bangladesh, and we remain committed to all efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians. Nearly 7,000 peacekeepers from Bangladesh are serving in some of the most challenging missions, providing security at civilian sites, ensuring unhindered humanitarian services, supporting the delivery of health and social services and community engagement and working for the empowerment of women and young people.

We are also providing shelter and protection to more than 1 million forcibly displaced Rohingya civilians, who fled atrocities and persecution in Myanmar. We remain concerned about the fact that the situation in Myanmar is still unsafe for civilians, especially the ethnic and religious minorities such as the Rohingya. The continued defiance of the Myanmar authorities in refusing to grant access to United Nations and other humanitarian actors is a stark reminder of our failure to uphold even the most fundamental tenets of the protection of civilians. We reiterate our call for more decisive action by the Security Council to ensure the protection of civilians at risk in that country. I would now like to highlight three specific points.

First, we must ensure that all parties to conflict respect and comply fully with international humanitarian law. We need to step up efforts to raise awareness among all stakeholders concerning their international humanitarian law obligations and those arising from Security Council resolutions such as resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel, and 2573 (2021), on the protection of critical civilian infrastructure. The International Committee of the Red Cross and relevant United Nations agencies working on the ground have a critical role to play, and local organizations working at the grass-roots level also need support in that regard. At the same time, the Security Council itself should use its tools, including sanctions regimes, to address and prevent the recurrence of attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure and other soft targets such as schools and hospitals.

Secondly, ensuring the safety and security of peacekeepers and humanitarian workers is critical. Attacks on peacekeepers and aid workers are often instigated by misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, including through online platforms. The relevant United Nations entities should develop an effective communications strategy to combat the problem. Peacekeeping missions should be adequately resourced and equipped to fulfil their protection of civilian mandates, including through community engagement and intelligence-gathering and analysis, among other things. The Security Council should factor in those issues when setting the mandates of peacekeeping missions.

Lastly, we have to break the culture of impunity and hold perpetrators accountable for violations of international humanitarian law. Targeting civilians, schools, hospitals and humanitarian actors cannot be

condoned under any pretext, and such attacks must be investigated and accounted for. In that regard, we would like to point to resolution 2601 (2021), on protecting the protectors, and call for its effective implementation. While it is critically important to strengthen national judicial institutions in host countries, the Council should also support international accountability mechanisms, including the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, and thereby send the right message to the perpetrators.

As champions of the protection of civilians, we remain committed to doing our part and contributing to all efforts aimed at the protection of civilians.

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

Mrs. Ali (Maldives): I would like to thank the United States for convening today's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also want to thank our briefers for their important insights and the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/381).

Armed conflicts have deep and far-reaching consequences, particularly for civilians. Our priority, and the mandate of the Security Council itself, is the maintenance of international peace and security. First and foremost, our goal must therefore be to avoid armed conflicts through effective dialogue and engaged multilateralism. That must always be our highest priority. However, when conflict does arise, it is absolutely crucial for all the parties, including State and non-State actors, to comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians.

In recent years, in conflicts the world over, we have seen disturbing reports, videos and other evidence of attacks on civilians and their infrastructure, including schools, medical facilities, the media and journalists, as well as housing and shelters. Humanitarian workers have also come under attack. Maldives forcefully condemns the targeting of civilians and emphasizes the need for the full and effective implementation of the relevant international obligations on the protection of civilian infrastructure. Such attacks result not only in civilian deaths but in psychological and mental health trauma and conditions where sexual violence, disappearances and family separation are rife. At the same time, conflicts damage infrastructure and undermine vital civic services such as water, sanitation, electricity and health care, which can have further

negative consequences. That is particularly distressing given the current global pandemic.

Care must also be taken to ensure that we do not rush to judgment based on limited facts and the misinformation present in many of those cases. The issues must not be adjudicated in the media. It is vital to collect all information and proceed judiciously, using internationally agreed mechanisms and frameworks. In that regard, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. We need countries to meet their existing obligations under international humanitarian law. The words of the esteemed jurist and United States Chief Prosecutor at Nuremberg, Robert H. Jackson, are particularly relevant to this point. He stated eloquently,

“It is futile to think [...] that we can have an international law that is always working on our side. And it is futile to think that we can have international courts that will always render the decisions we want to promote our interests. We cannot successfully cooperate with the rest of the world in establishing a reign of law unless we are prepared to have that law sometimes operate against what would be our national advantage.”

No power can come from above to enforce those international rules and norms. Our multilateral system requires that we take a principled approach to violations. A system where political motives guide which cases and issues are further pursued will work to undermine rather than foster our efforts to address violations, and that must be avoided.

We also urge those who have yet to ratify the Rome Statute to do so and demonstrate their fundamental commitment to the rule of law and peace and security and to preventing the most serious crimes under international law — genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. By having more countries join the International Criminal Court (ICC), we can work to make our international criminal justice system more universal and provide access for all. Once again, the work of the ICC and prosecutors must be independent and not influenced by political interests, or we risk undermining one of the key tools we have in our arsenal to protect the rights of civilians in situations of armed conflict.

Maldives, as a small country, has always considered respect for and adherence to international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the rules and norms of our multilateral system to be vital. In situations of

armed conflict, we have no winners. We must therefore work with renewed vigour to prevent conflicts and, in situations where armed conflict is taking place, to guarantee that the parties ensure the protection of civilians.

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

Ms. Chan Valverde (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): As we commemorate protection-of-civilians week, Costa Rica acknowledges and deplors the undue human toll that armed conflicts continue to inflict on innocent girls, boys, women and men caught in the middle of hostilities. In that regard, let me highlight two aspects.

First, Costa Rica regrets that the Security Council continues to fall short in fulfilling its mandate under Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations. In 2021, global military spending exceeded \$2 trillion for the first time in history. We can expect that without a corresponding regulatory effort, we will see increases in the expansion of armaments that Article 26 was intended to prevent, and a consequent impact on conflict and armed violence.

It is therefore more urgent than ever that the Security Council, with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee, propose plans for a system for regulating arms. It must include a more robust effort to monitor and enforce Security Council arms embargoes at the national and regional levels. Similarly, United Nations actors such as peacekeeping missions and their troop-contributing countries must also play a central role in monitoring arms and ammunition and related information-sharing with the Sanctions Committees, in line with their mandates. However, they are not doing so in a robust manner.

Those steps, complemented by substantial and more transparent risk assessments of arms and ammunition transfers, can help resolve the contradiction between our efforts to ensure the protection of civilians and the effects of the uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of conventional weapons and their ammunition. Costa Rica believes that disarmament starts at the beginning of the life cycle of weapons, including the decision not to produce or acquire them in the first place.

Secondly, the use of cyberoperations as a means or method of warfare in situations of armed conflict poses a genuine risk to the welfare of civilians and

critical infrastructure. Power grids, sewage systems and hospitals remain vulnerable to cyberattacks, with grave humanitarian consequences. This novel threat requires novel solutions and a better understanding of our conception of the protection of civilians that is adapted to the digital age.

Costa Rica calls for the strengthening of commitments for the protection of civilians and critical infrastructure, including an understanding of the applicability of international law in protecting civilians from cyberoperations in contexts of armed conflict.

According to the World Bank, 55 per cent of the global population lived in cities in 2021, and by 2050 that figure is expected to increase to 70 per cent. Therefore, the impact of the uncontrolled production and proliferation of weapons and their ammunition, as well as the intensity of cyberattacks against civilian infrastructure, will increasingly affect populations living in densely populated areas. Costa Rica calls on the Council to recognize and adopt the necessary measures to prevent such scenarios and demonstrate its commitment through concrete and sustained actions.

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

Mr. Mainero (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since the inclusion of the protection of civilians as an item on the Security Council's agenda in 1999, it has been one of the Council's thematic priorities. It is essential that the Security Council remain committed to the issue through the promotion of full respect for international law, in particular international humanitarian law, international human rights law and refugee law.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/381) and appreciate its recommendations and conclusions.

We regret that armed conflicts continue to be characterized by high levels of death, injury, sexual violence, torture, family separation and disappearances. Today 55 per cent of the world's population reside in urban areas. The conduct of hostilities in densely populated areas increases the risks of death and injury to civilians, especially when explosive weapons are used in combat. In 2021, more than 1,000 incidents involving explosive weapons were recorded in populated areas, resulting in more than 10,000 casualties. In that context, there is an urgent need for parties to conflict to avoid

the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.

It is also necessary to continue to include and strengthen protection of civilians activities on the ground in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions. In that regard, we understand that the protection of civilians is an integrated mission-wide effort, requiring as an essential first step close cooperation among military, police and civilian components, in coordination with Governments, local communities and humanitarian organizations on the ground. The use of force to respond to threats of physical violence against civilians must be authorized in accordance with applicable legal obligations, the mandate established by the Security Council and mission-specific rules of engagement.

Regardless of how armed actors undertake their operations, international humanitarian law obliges the parties to a conflict to allow and facilitate humanitarian access to affected areas and civilians in need. Attacks on humanitarian personnel and unreasonable bureaucratic impediments unduly hamper the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We regret the fact that, six years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), medical personnel, transport and facilities continue to be targeted in armed conflicts. According to the Secretary-General's report, health personnel, facilities and transport were targeted and medical care were interfered with by parties to conflicts throughout 2021.

During 2020 and 2021, the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had a devastating impact on countries affected by armed conflict. The situation led the Council to adopt resolution 2565 (2021), which required all parties to conflict to immediately implement a sustained and durable humanitarian pause to facilitate the equitable and safe distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in conflict-affected areas. Against such a backdrop, the protection of medical personnel and infrastructure is essential to ensure the large-scale distribution of vaccines.

Another critical element in the protection of civilians is the investigation of the facts and holding to account those responsible for crimes against civilians. In that regard, Argentina considers it appropriate to highlight that, in addition to the ad hoc commissions of inquiry that may be established, international humanitarian law offers an instrument for the investigation of incidents

that could constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions by an impartial entity — the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission provided for in Protocol Additional I to the Geneva Conventions.

On the other hand, Argentina wishes to highlight the fundamental role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the fight against impunity. Recourse to the ICC is a key tool in the search for justice and in many cases the key to access to the Court is held by the Security Council.

Over 20 years since the adoption of the first Security Council resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, civilians continue to represent the vast majority of conflict victims. The problem lies not in the current normative framework, but in the translation and implementation of those norms in practice. In order to translate the normative advances of the past 20 years into demonstrable results, the Security Council, together with the international community as a whole, must advocate for a more robust implementation of the existing normative framework.

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

Mr. Koba (Indonesia): At the outset, I would like to thank the United States for convening this open debate and thank all of our speakers for their poignant briefings.

We are witnessing more civilians losing their lives to armed conflict. The use of explosive weapons, especially in urban and densely populated environments, has resulted in devastating consequences for civilians. Homes, schools and critical infrastructure that provides livelihoods are completely destroyed, leaving those who survive in devastating conditions. Once again, the world wishes to see the Security Council exercise more of its moral weight to protect civilians in armed conflict, especially women and children. Allow me to underline three points.

First, we must amplify our calls for the cessation of hostilities and a global ceasefire. We have been briefed many times in the Council on how armed conflict and the pandemic are worsening humanitarian conditions. In order to save the lives of innocent civilians in situations of armed conflict, the cessation of hostilities and ceasefires constitute the most essential preconditions. There is no other option, as only then does lasting peace stand a chance. Safe passage must be guaranteed without impediment for civilians wishing to evacuate

and for humanitarian personnel to deliver assistance. At the same time, respect for and full compliance with international humanitarian law must be restored and dialogue and negotiations must be intensified.

Secondly, community engagement is essential for protecting civilians. Comprehensive strategies to protect civilians should be strategic, inclusive and anchored in a people-centred approach. Local communities must become part and parcel of the development and implementation of the strategy. It should be tailor-made, and we must listen to the needs of the communities affected. In that regard, Indonesia would like to commend the approach taken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan and Abyei in incorporating community engagement to improve the protection of civilians.

As a major troop- and police-contributing country, Indonesia is cognizant of the expectation that peacekeepers should do more to protect civilians. But such expectations should be accompanied by adequate resources for them to do so. To that end, we urge Member States to pay their financial contributions in full, on time and without conditions, and the Secretariat to settle any outstanding reimbursements for troop- and police-contributing countries without delay.

Thirdly, women's empowerment must be at the centre of policies on the protection of civilians. As agents of the protection of civilians, women bring a unique perspective and approach that enable them to gain wider access to communities. That is essential to the trust and confidence-building that contributes to the peace process. As the initiator of resolution 2538 (2020), Indonesia believes in the important role of women peacekeepers in community engagement and by extension in the protection of civilians. We are therefore committed to increasing the numbers of female peacekeepers. We also call on all Member States to ensure that the resolution is fully implemented.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that protecting innocent civilians in armed conflict is a matter of basic principles of humanity. We need to work together to strive always for peaceful solutions to conflict. We therefore urge all Member States to uphold the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of refraining from the use of force and respecting territorial integrity. It is our duty to ensure that civilians are protected in armed conflict, and it is our shared responsibility to preserve humankind.

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

Mr. Castañeda Solares (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala thanks the delegation of the United States of America for convening today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also thank the briefers for their briefings. I would like to acknowledge the concept note circulated as the basis for discussion today. We agree with the comments about the importance of the legal basis needed to ensure humanitarian access and the protection of humanitarian workers — a legal framework that already exists in international humanitarian law but that regrettably is disregarded all too often.

As a troop-contributing country, and because of the importance that my delegation attaches to the mandate of the protection of civilians, Guatemala is honoured to have hosted a workshop on the review of the handbook on *The Protection of Civilians for Military Components in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*. Over the years, we have noted the developments in and the strengthening of the protection of civilians component within the United Nations framework, with resolution 1265 (1999), the first Security Council resolution on the protection of civilians, as a reference, as well as the various reports of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and discussions we have had at ministerial meetings on peacekeeping.

Actual experience on the ground has demonstrated that we must have a comprehensive focus on the protection of civilians that takes into account and addresses the various factors that have an influence on or underpin the various threats, such as political, economic and security factors. We must also ensure that all components of peace missions — civilian, police and military — work together. We are pleased that the current United Nations policy on the protection of civilians clearly stipulates the functions and expectations of the relevant components in order to ensure that the protection of civilians can be completely integrated into the planning and activities of every mission. It should be acknowledged that despite the efforts of the Secretariat, through its various policies and manuals; the troop- and police-contributing countries, through various memorandums of understanding; and host countries, through the various status of forces agreements, there is still considerable room for improving and strengthening efforts aimed at the full

implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions.

In the near future, we hope that the Secretariat will also have a policy with a broader scope and zero caveats to ensure the full implementation of mandates at the operational level, in particular with regard to the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate in peacekeeping operations, so as to be able to fully cooperate with humanitarian organizations and provide immediate assistance to the most vulnerable and needy populations. We also hope that the Special Committee for Peacekeeping Operations will update its mandate next year in order to create renewed momentum in one of the most crucial components of peacekeeping — the protection of civilians.

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

Mr. Amorín (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Uruguay would like to thank the Permanent Mission of the United States for convening today's open debate and for making it possible for Member States to share their views on the topic. We also thank the briefers for their briefings and contributions today, in particular in the current context, where we are witnessing violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. All such violations and situations of armed conflict pose a threat to international peace and security.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect and the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, and we would like to make some additional remarks in our national capacity.

Uruguay is strongly committed to the agenda of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and acknowledges its extremely close links to the agendas on women and peace and security and children and armed conflict. We support the Kigali Principles on the protection of civilians, the outcome of the International Conference on the Protection of Civilians organized by Rwanda, as we believe in the importance of the protection of civilians as a way to preserve the physical and moral integrity of people caught up in conflict, especially the most vulnerable.

As a troop-contributing country, we would like to underscore that our troops carry out tasks related to the protection of civilians and have done so for many

years. Our experience on the ground has shown that this is a task that brings the United Nations closest to the local populations suffering from the effects of violence. Regrettably, despite the progress made on legal and normative standards in recent years, as a troop-contributing country we can attest to the fact that civilians, especially women and children, continue to be some of the worst affected in armed conflict and post-conflict situations.

With regard to children and the protection of the right to education, and bearing in mind the increase in the number of attacks on institutions, particularly educational institutions, in 2021 and again this year, we call on all Member States to support the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflicts. We strongly condemn attacks on civilians, including students and teachers, as well as on civilian infrastructure, including schools and universities, in line with resolution 2601 (2021).

With regard to peace operations, we again acknowledge efforts to improve the protection of civilians with the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative and its implementation strategy, A4P Plus. We reiterate our country's support for the efforts of the Secretary-General in that regard.

Peaceful solutions based on the principles of justice, human rights and international law, early warning, inclusive political dialogue, the strengthening of State institutions and the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, with a gender perspective, are inextricably linked to prevention. They are also essential elements in the establishment of solid environments for protection. The conflicts we are witnessing these days — not just in Ukraine, the Middle East or various parts of Africa — are a painful manifestation of the dire situation in which civilians find themselves when facing conflict and violations of their human rights and humanitarian law.

Finally, Uruguay calls for general respect for human rights, international law and humanitarian law, and underlines the need to ensure access to humanitarian aid and to halt hostilities that limit or jeopardize humanitarian operations, which are intended to meet the basic needs of populations. The Security Council has a crucial responsibility in upholding these principles without prejudice to the obligations incumbent upon

all States Members of the United Nations within the framework of the General Assembly.

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

Mr. Cho (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, I would first like to thank you for convening today's timely open debate.

One of the key elements to protecting civilians in armed conflict, especially those facing a humanitarian crisis, is to ensure humanitarian access. The international community has repeatedly called upon all parties in armed conflicts to ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and the delivery of supplies and equipment. Unfortunately, we are still witnessing a deeply concerning denial of humanitarian access in armed conflicts, including in parts of Ukraine.

As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General this month (S/2022/381), humanitarian activities have been continuously under pressure from a heightened level of hostilities and the increased use of explosive devices. It is simply unacceptable that more than 800 humanitarians have been killed or wounded in the past five years and that the number of incidents of kidnapping surpasses a thousand.

My delegation would like to make the following comments with regard to some crucial ways forward in ensuring better humanitarian access. First, my delegation urges the Security Council to be more vocal in ensuring humanitarian access, which is closely related to its mandate of maintaining international peace and security. We also request all States Members of the United Nations to faithfully respect and act upon relevant resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly.

Secondly, the international community must redouble its sustained efforts to ensure respect for and compliance with international law, including fulfilling obligations under international humanitarian law in relation to humanitarian activities and holding those who violate such obligations to account. All parties to armed conflict need to clearly understand what international law dictates and that denial of humanitarian access and attacks against humanitarian workers and objects may, under certain conditions, constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Thirdly, it is critical to ensure systematic documentation of and evidence collection from incidents related to the denial of humanitarian access and violations of relevant international law, as well as to make such information available to the public so that any attempt to spread misinformation and disinformation can be countered. In this regard, the Republic of Korea supports all relevant efforts, including those undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the current situation in Ukraine. The international crisis caused by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine has been prolonged, and it has unleashed various repercussions all over the world. The Republic of Korea has paid close attention to the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and in its neighbouring countries. It is quite doubtful that the merciless destruction of residential facilities and major infrastructure caused by Russian forces' heavy shelling and missile strikes in the cities of Ukraine, let alone civilian casualties, can be justified under international humanitarian law. All of these situations have triggered great misery and are a great cause for concern.

The Republic of Korea has supported the international community's efforts to assist Ukraine. The Republic of Korea has, *inter alia*, provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine and will keep looking at possible ways to assist the country and impacted neighbours. The desired effects of humanitarian assistance would be significantly weakened if parties to armed conflict ignored their obligation to protect civilians—and the necessity of doing so — and to respect relevant international norms. The Republic of Korea demands full respect for such norms and, above all, an immediate cessation of the hostilities.

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

Mr. Hadjichrysanthou (Cyprus): Let me begin by expressing our sincere condolences for the senseless violence in Texas yesterday.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and wishes to make some additional remarks.

We note the small reduction in civilian casualties reported by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2022/381). Still, the immense scale of suffering of the millions of civilians who have to survive in dire conditions, notwithstanding the clear obligation of States under international law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure in armed conflict, remains alarming. The ongoing war in Ukraine is a demonstration of the tragic repercussions of conflict on civilians.

In addition to upholding the prohibition of the use of force and ensuring a ceasefire, the Security Council must use all other tools at its disposal to protect civilians. In that regard, my delegation wishes to highlight the following areas of concern.

First, the number of persons displaced by conflict continues to grow, with more than 80 million in 2021. We are particularly concerned about situations of protracted displacement, where we are convinced that the Security Council can take more robust action to ensure the right of return as early as possible, the respect for the property rights of those displaced and the prohibition of settling other populations in areas of forced displacement. As a country subjected to all the foregoing aspects as a result of foreign aggression, we know just how powerful those phenomena are in upending the lives of civilians and solidifying the effects of the unlawful use of force.

Secondly, the number of persons who are missing as a result of conflict is also exceedingly high, and the humanitarian nature of this issue is not always respected. We need better international cooperation frameworks and to strengthen search and identification mechanisms. We also need the Council to build on resolution 2474 (2019), and we need more robust provisions in Council resolutions on situations where the fate and whereabouts of missing persons remain unknown for decades, such as in Cyprus.

Thirdly, the issue of civilians living under occupation has been largely overlooked by the Council. Many of those civilians endure daily violations of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to privacy and family life, education, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and property rights. Moreover, the persistent harassment and intimidation of civilians often indirectly result in the forced displacement and ethnic cleansing of an area's indigenous population.

Fourthly, accountability and the administration of international criminal justice for serious crimes is another area with room for improvement. By default, the Council should consider the referral of such situations to the International Criminal Court. At the same time, the Council should reject peace agreements that include amnesty for atrocity crimes, including sexual violence.

Finally, before concluding, I wish to refer to the inextricable link between peacekeeping and the protection of civilians. We consider this component to form part of the mandate of every peacekeeping operation, without prejudice to the primary responsibility of host countries to protect civilians, and we would like to see the reporting and other capacities of peacekeeping operations enhanced in that respect.

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

Mr. Othman (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this annual open debate. I would also like to thank all the briefers for their valuable interventions. Malaysia is pleased to see the Security Council's sustained commitment to discussing this important topic, including implementing resolution 2286 (2016), which we supported during our Council membership in 2016.

We are appalled by the continued attacks on civilians, including journalists, media workers and humanitarian personnel in conflict situations. Impunity continues to prevail in many armed conflicts due to the persisting lack of accountability for crimes committed against civilians. In many situations, such as in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, the cycle of impunity enjoyed by the occupier continues to encourage future violations.

Malaysia once again calls on all parties to armed conflict to comply fully with their obligations under international law. We also call on all parties to facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for medical and humanitarian personnel and to respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. We also call on the Security Council, as the custodian of peace and security, to ensure that the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law be consistently applied in all conflicts.

The Secretary-General's latest report on the protection of civilians (S/2022/381) underscores the grim reality that armed conflict continued to be

characterized by high levels of civilian death, injury, psychological trauma, sexual violence, torture, family separation and disappearance. In that respect, I would like to focus on three central aspects that Malaysia considers of particular importance.

First, my delegation continues to believe that conflict represents a systemic risk for civilians. A ceasefire must therefore be the first step to prevent further civilian deaths and injuries, followed by efforts to address the root causes of conflict in order to ensure lasting peace. We continue to call on Member States, and particularly on the Council, to honour the commitment to support the Secretary-General's call in 2020 for a global ceasefire. We also stress that the prevention, de-escalation and resolution of conflicts must be achieved only by peaceful means.

Secondly, it is pivotal to recognize the critical role of diverse local civil society and actors in the protection of civilians. All actors should take advantage of the expertise and perspective of local actors and communities, including the meaningful engagement of women, youth and marginalized populations, in supporting the efforts of unarmed civilians to protect themselves. That partnership should extend, but not be limited, to financial resources, best practices and mechanisms that communities use to protect themselves. At the same time, Malaysia is also of the view that much more could be done to recognize the role of women and youth as agents of peace. That recognition could further empower them to play an active role in creating or supporting a safe environment with and for the local community.

Thirdly, we need to strengthen the capacity and mandate of our peacekeepers. Malaysia concurs that the provision of civilian protection mandates to peacekeeping operations by the Security Council is vital in curbing violence against civilians. Our peacekeepers must be trained appropriately and adequately to protect civilians. We also believe that operational plans and strategies to protect civilians that are used by peacekeeping missions must be informed by an analysis of the various impacts of conflict on all populations, especially vulnerable groups.

Let me conclude by reiterating the need for us to do more to ensure the protection of civilians, including strengthening accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations in armed conflicts.

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

Mrs. Furman (Israel): Let me first express my deepest condolences for the tragic murder of innocent children and teachers in Texas. Our hearts bleed from this horrific tragedy. Our prayers are with you, Mr. President, and your country at this very difficult time.

For Israel, a nation that has faced incessant conflict from the moment of our foundation, the protection of civilians in armed conflict is of the utmost importance. As the ancient Jewish axiom goes,

“Whoever saves even one life, it is as if they saved an entire world.”

That is the moral code by which Israel abides. Israel goes to great lengths to develop different defensive technologies such as Iron Dome to protect our citizens. This commitment to saving lives goes far beyond our borders. Recently, Israel became the first country to establish a state-of-the-art field hospital in Ukraine, providing humanitarian access to injured civilians.

Yet while Israel takes every measure to save civilian lives, the brutal terrorist groups that all for Israel's destruction not only target Israeli civilians but also use their own people as human shields. Hamas digs terror tunnels under hospitals and schools and uses them to store weapons and launch rockets. That is a double war crime.

Almost exactly one year ago, during Operation Guardian of the World, over 4,000 Hamas rockets fired from densely populated residential neighbourhoods in Gaza rained down on Israeli cities. But even when Israel was under fire, we worked with the United Nations and the international community to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Tragically, Hamas targeted the crossing, thereby preventing the aid from reaching the Palestinians in Gaza.

That is the modus operandi of Hamas and of Hizbullah, which runs and funds a terrorist army entrenched along Israel's northern border and now has 150 rockets pointed at Israel. Just last month, on 25 April, rockets were launched from a populated area in southern Lebanon, within the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, towards civilian communities in northern Israel. Hizbullah's arsenal of rockets are aimed directly at our towns and our critical infrastructure. Just like Hamas,

Hizbullah is storing them under the cover of innocent Lebanese civilians.

I must mention one more important remark. Just yesterday, I met Leah and Simha Goldin, the parents of Second Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, who was abducted and murdered by Hamas in 2014 during a humanitarian ceasefire. I accompanied the parents as they met with Member States in order to aid them in bringing their son's body home for burial. Sadly, the Goldins are not alone. For the past eight years, Hamas has held the bodies of both Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, who was abducted and killed a week before Hadar. Moreover, Hamas is holding two Israeli civilians hostage — Avera Mangistu and Hisham Al-Sayed — without disclosing any information about their well-being. This blatant disregard for international law and deliberate targeting of civilian populations must end, and it must end now.

While Israel takes every measure to protect the lives of the innocent, both Israelis and others, the same cannot be said of those who seek our destruction. Indiscriminate rocket fire on the civilian population, the use of one's own people as human shields and holding civilians hostage must be condemned. But more than that, it must end. We urge that all join us in condemning those acts of terror.

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

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, consisting of 55 Member States and the European Union and this year co-chaired by Botswana, Costa Rica and Croatia.

Today we bear witness to a continuing and pervasive erosion of respect for civilian lives and objects and an appalling disregard in some regions for the norms and laws that States established to avert the impacts of armed conflict. As a result of such disregard, on a daily basis we are witnessing great levels of human suffering and a high risk of mass atrocity crimes being perpetrated against civilian populations. All Member States have committed to the responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless, we note that more than 100 million people are currently displaced as a result of conflict, atrocities and persecution worldwide. The commission of systematic, egregious and widespread violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law,

as applicable, in situations of armed conflict endangers the peace and security of the entire world.

Today's debate on the protection of civilians and safe and unhindered humanitarian access shines a critical light on a defining challenge in many situations where atrocities have already occurred or where there is a high risk of atrocities being perpetrated. In conflict settings, active hostilities severely constrain and jeopardize humanitarian operations, hindering efforts to meet the basic needs of populations. Moreover, we have increasingly witnessed States Members of the United Nations and other parties to conflicts engage in the deliberate denial of humanitarian access, including by blocking the passage and delivery of humanitarian assistance and services or deliberately attacking humanitarian and medical workers and assets, in violation of international humanitarian law. That has an alarming impact on vulnerable civilian populations, who face neglect, grave protection risks, potential starvation, significant public health crises and an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence.

It is in that context that the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect would like to stress the following points.

First, the Group of Friends demands that all parties allow and facilitate, in accordance with the relevant provisions of international law and consistent with humanitarian principles, the full, safe, immediate and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel, equipment and supplies and the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need, including by lifting arbitrary bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian operations, allowing the flow of humanitarian aid and services into conflict areas and protecting humanitarian and medical actors and civilians from attacks. When protecting humanitarian access to all people in need in conflict settings is a matter of international peace and security, the Security Council should continue to play a constructive role in encouraging the protection of humanitarian access.

Secondly, compliance with international law is fundamental to the protection of civilians and civilian objects. Many civilian deaths, as well as suffering and displacement, could be avoided if all parties to conflicts respected international humanitarian law and human rights. Some States have effective programmes in their armed forces to comply with international humanitarian

law. However, we are witnessing attacks directed against civilian infrastructure, including health-care facilities and schools, some in violation of international humanitarian law. It is important to remember that indiscriminate attacks and attacks targeting medical facilities and civilian objects, including those that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, as well as attacks on the civilian population, including those who are humanitarian workers, may amount to war crimes.

Thirdly, it is of the utmost importance that States that have not yet done so put in place appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to comprehensively recognize and address violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, and hold those who commit such violations and abuses accountable. Accountability not only helps to provide justice and support for victims, but it is also key to efforts to deter future violations and abuses and supports reconciliation processes and the re-establishment of peace. Appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements, as well as compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, would significantly contribute to the prevention and alleviation of human suffering.

Fourthly, support for the protection of civilians should be responsive to gender, age and other core demographic considerations. Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security note that armed conflict and emergencies have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Their needs and rights must be considered and addressed, alongside their full, equal, safe and meaningful participation. The Group urges the United Nations and other relevant actors to ensure that affected populations, including women and girls, are involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of civilian protection strategies and activities.

Far too many civilians are killed in both deliberate and indiscriminate attacks in today's complex and protracted conflicts. The denial of humanitarian access exacerbates risks to civilians who struggle to meet their basic needs. The international community should make every effort to protect civilians and assist those impacted by conflict. The members of the Security Council should continue to take timely and decisive action aimed at ending and preventing atrocities and should not hinder credible efforts to that end.

We call on the members of the Security Council to respond to, and address, the risk or commission of mass atrocities, noting in that context the initiatives on the use of the veto in the case of mass atrocities, including the French-Mexican initiative and the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group code of conduct.

Finally, the surest way to protect civilians is by investing in the prevention of conflict and atrocity crimes through early warning and in the peaceful settlements of disputes, based on the principles of justice, human rights and international law.

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

Archbishop Caccia: The Holy See would like to thank the United States of America for convening today's important debate. First, however, we would like to express our heartfelt condolences for the tragic loss of life in Uvalde, Texas.

In the past few months, we have witnessed the tragic consequences of armed conflict return to Europe on a scale not seen for a generation. Faced with violence, nearly 13 million Ukrainians fled their homes to avoid becoming casualties of war. The same reality is visible in every country and region affected by conflict and war across the globe. In the Middle East, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and South-East Asia, thousands upon thousands have been forced to decide whether to flee their homes or to remain in place and risk physical harm and even death. Despite the humanization of warfare being an aspirational concept for centuries, the brunt of conflict still falls disproportionately on the innocent and the defenceless.

Since first adding this item to its agenda in 1999, the Security Council has elaborated on protections owed to those who face heightened risks during conflict, including humanitarian personnel, health-care workers, journalists, displaced persons, women, children and persons with disabilities. The Council has also urged all parties to armed conflict to protect civilian infrastructure critical to the provision of essential services. The Holy See commends such efforts, while underscoring the need to implement those protections fully and further incorporate such protections in all peacekeeping mandates. In that regard, my delegation would like to offer some concrete recommendations on three key issues for the Council's consideration.

First, the Holy See urges the Council to keep the protection of civilian objects high on its agenda. That includes the protection of places of worship. Religious sites not only provide believers with a place where they can live their faith but often play a crucial social, cultural and educational role in society and, especially in conflict situations, are a source of assistance, aid and even protection. Places of worship are objects akin to schools or hospitals, and therefore should benefit from similar protection.

Secondly, efforts to protect civilians must respond to the secondary consequences of war and conflict, which linger long after the guns fall silent. Of paramount concern is ending the production, stockpiling and use of indiscriminate weapons, such as anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. Such weapons, together with other explosive remnants of war, contaminate the lived environment and continue to threaten civilians with severe injury or death, even after the end of hostilities. For adequate civilian protection, greater resources are needed for programmes to clear areas of unexploded ordnance. In that regard, my delegation commends the vital work of the Mine Action Service.

Thirdly, we express deep concern about the growing number of attacks perpetrated against humanitarian personnel, which impede the provision of vital assistance and, as the world continues its efforts to tackle the coronavirus disease pandemic, prevent the widespread distribution of vaccines. Furthermore, when perpetrators escape accountability a culture of impunity takes hold, placing more humanitarian workers at risk and weakening the rule of law more broadly. In order to end that cycle, greater efforts are needed by both States and the Council.

In conclusion, the Holy See reiterates its call for all parties to conflict — State and non-State actors alike — to fully comply with international humanitarian law until the point when humankind reaches its highest aspiration, as reflected in the Charter of the United Nations, of abolishing war in all its manifestations.

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

Mr. Vidal (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we offer our sincere condolences to your country, Sir, on the tragedy that occurred yesterday at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. We join other States Members in our show of solidarity with the affected community

and families, in particular the parents and siblings of the child victims.

Chile thanks the Permanent Mission of the United States for convening this timely debate in the framework of protection of civilians week. We also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/381) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The protection of civilians has been entrusted to us as a duty and warrants the utmost attention and commitment in its treatment. To that end, we acknowledge its central place on the agenda of this organ. Similarly, we urge the Security Council to continue discussing the protection of civilians beyond the security aspect on the ground and in terms of preventive approaches that identify the causes of conflict, promote the rule of law and accountability and prioritize the human rights of civilian populations as its core value.

Of particular concern is the food security situation — 140 million people experienced acute food security crises last year. We also continue to be alarmed by civilian casualties resulting from improvised explosive devices; last year, 1,234 incidents were reported involving the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, 89 per cent of which resulted in civilian casualties. Moreover, in the context of the global pandemic, it is reprehensible that both health-care personnel and hospitals continue to be targeted for attack by parties to armed conflict.

We would be remiss not to draw attention to the situation of children in various areas of conflict, as school closures, including those caused by attacks, have increased the vulnerabilities of tens of thousands of children as they abandon their studies to march towards the front lines. That has been exacerbated by the occurrence of a variety of attacks, thereby exposing children to increased risk of abduction, sexual violence and recruitment and, consequently, to dire long-term repercussions for their physical and mental health.

The protection of the most vulnerable people in conflict depends to a large extent on strengthening the application of the framework of international law, including international humanitarian law and instruments such as the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, of which Chile is a signatory. In addition, we believe that our actions must be grounded in the women and peace and security agenda.

Accountability measures must be implemented by placing victims at the centre of every effort. In that regard, strengthening the capacity of national institutions for access to justice, as well as international monitoring and reporting mechanisms, is key to preventing impunity and crimes that affect the most vulnerable populations. It is important that we continue to develop efforts so that our contingents in peacekeeping missions are properly equipped with the protection elements and tools to effectively achieve their goals, including through training during missions to mitigate the impact of operations on civilians before, during and after all operations.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that all wars attest to the undeniable reality that civilians are the major victims of armed conflicts, especially the most vulnerable members of the population, including women and children.

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

Mrs. Theofili (Greece): At the outset, I commend the United States for convening this timely meeting.

Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union, and I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/381), which unfortunately paints a grim picture of reality.

The world is currently faced with unprecedented levels of food insecurity, owing to widespread and protracted armed conflicts, including the war in Ukraine, as well as longer-term factors, such as climate change, the pandemic and displacement. The international community is struggling to tackle numerous simultaneous humanitarian crises from Ukraine to Ethiopia and from the Sahel to Myanmar, with millions of human lives at stake and with limited and overstretched resources at hand. Ongoing crises, such as in Syria and Afghanistan, seem no closer to a solution, despite being so many years down the road. Even when aid is available, active conflicts and political obstacles often render it undeliverable. Impeding humanitarian access — an act that could constitute a war crime — appears to be used deliberately in cases such as Mariupol.

Yemen is another indicative example of the fragility of humanitarian access under the present circumstances.

The humanitarian ceasefire, which has held for over a month now, has allowed sorely needed food aid to be delivered to some of the most vulnerable people.

In order to tackle the unprecedented humanitarian challenges we are currently faced with, no effort should be spared to ensure humanitarian access to those in need. The maintenance of humanitarian corridors is vital for saving lives, as the world has so dramatically witnessed during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We must therefore utilize and improve donor coordination mechanisms, both in the field and at the political level, ensure the compliance of State and non-State actors with international humanitarian law and facilitate cooperation among States and between States and international institutions.

Moreover, we need to ensure that no attacks against civilian infrastructure take place, in particular in the case of schools and medical facilities. In that vein, we need to place special emphasis on the protection of the most vulnerable, such as women and children, primarily from sexual exploitation and harassment.

Last but not least, accountability remains key in the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is up to us to make sure that no attacks or crimes against them go unpunished.

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

Mr. Nze (Nigeria): I would like to thank the delegation of the United States, as President of the Council for the month of May 2022, for organizing today's open debate.

The human, social and economic impacts of armed conflicts in the society are massive. Terrorism and violent extremism are the most challenging forms of armed conflict and have become serious threats to civilian populations. In recent times, schools have become targets in situations of armed conflict, while schoolchildren and educators have become vulnerable to attacks, abuse, exploitation and recruitment by armed groups.

The experience of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further exacerbated the plight of those children by heightening their vulnerability and depriving them of access to schools. The impact of armed conflict on education requires urgent humanitarian and developmental actions. Education in Nigeria is key to national development.

The quest for development will not be possible without the analytic, inventive and critical thinking enabled by a robust and uninterrupted education system. For those reasons, Nigeria is open to every initiative that will enhance education, both nationally and globally.

Nigeria has faced attacks on schools and educational facilities in recent years by the terrorist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State-West Africa Province. Their activities in the north-eastern part of the country, kidnapping of children for ransom, have also increased. The groups have capitalized on the priority afforded to education by targeting soft targets, especially vulnerable students and institutions of learning. As part of the commitment to ensure the protection of schools and educational facilities, the Government has prioritized the integration of safe schools and the protection of education into national policies.

To that end, the Safe Schools Initiative was launched in Nigeria in 2014 at the World Economic Forum on Africa held in Abuja. It has become a major driving force in response to the growing number of attacks on the right to education, including the kidnapping of over 200 girls of secondary school age in Chibok, Borno state. The Safe Schools Initiative has also been a major step in driving global action to protect the learning environment. We continue to strive to attract more countries to the Global Business Coalition for Education, as it has allowed us to transform the way in which school attacks are dealt with from social problems into policy action.

It was in that spirit that Nigeria co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 74/275, proclaiming 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. The resolution was adopted under Nigeria's presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. Nigeria also led the important effort towards the General Assembly's declaration of 24 January as the International Day of Education in 2018, consistent with the high value our country places on education.

In framing the Safe Schools Initiative, we have been fortunate to benefit from the goodwill and partnerships of friendly countries and corporate organizations. Nigeria hosted the fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in 2021 in Abuja together with our partners Argentina, Norway, Spain and the African Union Commission in order to promote

global cooperation and strengthen coordination on implementing the Safe Schools Declaration.

On that note, allow me to take this opportunity to express Nigeria's appreciation to the United Nations for its support for the Initiative through multi-donor funding. That is also important, as policies can be successful only with the collaboration of critical stakeholders in terms of capacity and finance.

In Nigeria, the Safe Schools Initiative resulted in the greater fortification of schools, as well as better communication with local communities. That has led to higher enrolment numbers in places where children had previously abandoned formal learning. There are also provisions under the Initiative for the night-time illumination of schools, communications devices, the development of safety manuals and skills and the promotion of safe zones for education. Those initiatives have also led to the improved protection of school infrastructure.

Education is about our common future. It is the most guaranteed enabler for a peaceful, just and prosperous world, especially for those at risk of being left behind. I would encourage all stakeholders, in particular those experiencing threats from extremists, to learn from Nigeria's experience in that regard and to protect schools from attack. We therefore call on Member States to endorse and implement the relevant initiatives as a tool to safeguard civilians, as well as the educational system, from any form of attack.

We must stand together to build an educational community on a global scale. People all over the world now live in the same global village. Our countries are more interconnected as we have become a community that shares the same destiny. We can achieve lasting stability and development only through strengthened solidarity, partnership and cooperation. In order to achieve a safe learning environment for our educational community globally, the international community must take joint action against the use of schools and facilities by armed groups during conflict. The use of explosives as weapons of conflict around schools and institutions of higher learning is unacceptable because it deprives children of their right to education and destroys their hopes and dreams.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to join all Africans in celebrating Africa Day. Africa Day is a day of celebration for Africans and people of African descent all over the world. It is also an

opportunity to reflect on the progress made by the African Union in achieving its goals, especially with regard to protecting the human rights and freedoms of Africans. Just as last year, the commemoration of Africa Day in 2022 comes at a very difficult time, with challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflict, climate change, violent extremism, terrorism, poverty and hunger. Our message today will therefore focus on the need to find and amplify innovative solutions that are aimed at addressing challenges on the continent. Africa has had its fair share of armed conflict; now is the time to put an end to it and instead focus on our development.

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

Mr. Hermann (Denmark): I deliver these remarks on behalf of the Nordic countries, namely, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Denmark.

We are extremely concerned about the devastating impacts of compounding conflicts and crises on civilians around the world. As always, people in the most vulnerable and marginalized situations are impacted the most. In order to save lives and alleviate human suffering, there is an urgent need to end conflicts and ensure full respect for international humanitarian law.

With the Russian aggression against Ukraine, we are seeing an unprecedented scale of destruction of critical civilian infrastructure and historically rapid displacement. We call on Russia to immediately end its unjustified war and spare civilian lives. We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts to push for an end to the aggression.

Devastating Russian attacks on cities such as Mariupol have yet again shown the urgent need for full compliance with international humanitarian law and the tragic consequences for civilians when international humanitarian law is so blatantly ignored. We must never accept impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Let me repeat, we must never do that, and the Nordic countries will never accept impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The war in Ukraine is another tragic example of the civilian consequences of war in urban and densely populated areas, where civilians are at higher risk and

where civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, is too often hit or even targeted. We call on all States to engage constructively in the ongoing consultations on a political declaration to address the humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Armed conflicts also have devastating effects on the natural environment, which further compounds the long-term consequences of conflict for civilians. International humanitarian law provides rules for protecting the environment in armed conflict, and those rules need to be put into action. The updated Guidelines of the International Committee of the Red Cross on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict and the work done by the International Law Commission should and must guide our endeavours.

We are extremely concerned about the rising conflict-driven food insecurity in many parts of the world, such as the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and Yemen, which is further aggravated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Nordic countries support international efforts to counter the crisis, including the Secretary-General's Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, in which the Prime Minister of Denmark is one of six Global Champions. More efforts are needed to alleviate hunger in armed conflict, and caused by armed conflict, in line with resolution 2417 (2018).

We are appalled by the number of humanitarian workers who are kidnapped, wounded or killed around the globe. Local humanitarians suffer by far the greatest proportion of casualties, and the percentage is increasing. We must take concrete measures to protect humanitarian actors working to save lives, including by investing in the safety and security of local staff.

It is vital that life-saving assistance and protection reach the people most in need and people in hard-to-reach areas. We once again call on parties to conflict to ensure safe, rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian actors, in accordance with international humanitarian law, and to guarantee respect for humanitarian principles. That is the responsibility of all parties to conflict, and the importance of it cannot be understated and the responsibility cannot be ignored. We must work actively and on multiple fronts to ensure safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access.

I would like to make three points.

First, we must counter the deeply worrisome trends of misinformation and disinformation eroding trust in the humanitarian mandate, putting humanitarians at risk and denying civilians the protection they need and require. To improve and maintain access, we must all do our part to ensure that the neutral, impartial and independent nature of humanitarian action is understood and respected.

Secondly, the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and Action Agenda have created new momentum to design better solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs). We must build on it. And a core priority should be reaching internally displaced persons, who are often in particularly vulnerable positions. We emphasize the need to align and mainstream the protection of IDPs as an integrated part of the protection of civilians, including in United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Thirdly, we must be better at reaching persons belonging to the most marginalized groups, such as children and women, and do so by focusing on their special protection needs, as well as on addressing the gendered impacts of war. We must prioritize preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence, providing life-saving sexual and reproductive health services and further integrating mental health and psychosocial support into preparedness, response and recovery, through meaningful and equal partnerships, including with women-led organizations.

Ultimately, ending civilian suffering during conflict is a question of political will, and parties to conflict must actively pursue peace and protect civilians. We must hold them accountable when they fail to honour those responsibilities.

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

Mr. Lagatie (Belgium): I would like to thank the United States for organizing today's important debate, as well as the briefers for their compelling briefings.

My country aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, as well as with the statements of the Group of friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

Early this year in a debate here in the Security Council, my delegation expressed its grave concern about the fact that respect for international humanitarian law

had dropped to an all-time low and that humanitarian needs had increased to an all-time high (see S/PV.8953). We deplored the resurgence of urban warfare in the last decades and its devastating impact on civilian populations, essential infrastructure and services, such as schools and hospitals. We condemned the fact that civilians represent close to 90 per cent of the casualties and that impediments to humanitarian access persist in far too many conflicts. We also expressed regret that the coronavirus disease pandemic had further aggravated an already critical situation.

If that were not enough, during the past three months, Russia's illegal and brutal aggression against Ukraine has further exacerbated all of those trends. Today the question facing us, with a renewed sense of urgency, is an obvious one. When will we successfully put an end to widespread civilian harm in conflicts? The answer to that question is obvious — when parties to conflict make it a political priority to strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and respect, at all times, its rules and principles, in particular the prohibition of direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects.

You, Mr. President, urged us to focus today's debate on practical ideas for ensuring better humanitarian access and breaking the trend of denial of access in conflict settings. My country would like to stress three points in that regard.

First, Belgium calls on parties to armed conflicts to facilitate rapid and unimpeded access to humanitarian relief and to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel. My country further urges all parties to remove barriers to humanitarian operations, starting with administrative barriers. In cases of excessive barriers, humanitarian actors should be granted the means to safely and effectively monitor, document and report on the denial and obstruction of and constraints on humanitarian actions.

Consistent and long-term engagement with all parties to conflict, including non-State armed groups for humanitarian purposes, should be fostered as a means to gain safe and timely access and to promote respect for international humanitarian law. My delegation welcomes the effort of Geneva Call in that regard. Humanitarian organizations and donors should also continue to support innovative initiatives such as cash assistance and the localization of efforts to ensure

that assistance reaches the most vulnerable, as well as the use of new technologies for needs assessment.

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

In the planning of military operations, greater attention should be given to the possible effects of hostilities on civilian infrastructure and services. 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 in order to reduce the risk of development reversal and to reinforce short-term emergency response. The development of partnerships with relevant actors, in particular local communities and essential service providers, is also key.

Thirdly, the denial of humanitarian access is one of the six grave violations identified and condemned by the Council as affecting children in armed conflicts. Children are the most vulnerable victims of conflict and humanitarian disasters. Belgium remains committed to addressing the needs of children affected by armed conflict, while facilitating access to essential services, such as health and education, and intensifying efforts to prevent and address grave violations against them. In that vein, my delegation calls on all parties to address the plight of children in particular 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 Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles.

In conclusion, Belgium promotes a multidimensional approach to the protection of civilians based on prevention, protection, monitoring and accountability. The fight against impunity for the most serious crimes, at both the national and international levels, remains one of Belgium's priorities. We continue to support international justice and accountability mechanisms for violation of international law and urge all States Members of the United Nations to do the same.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We thank the United States delegation for convening this important annual Security Council debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and we thank all the briefers for their insightful briefings.

The Secretary-General's latest report on this item (S/2022/381) paints a very grim picture. In 2021, the United Nations recorded at least 11,075 civilian deaths across 12 armed conflicts. Yet the number of recorded civilian deaths actually declined in comparison to the previous year. This decline was due, in large measure, to the cessation of the conflict in Afghanistan after 15 August 2021. Following 40 years of fighting, there is an opportunity now to restore peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. One Government controls the entire country. There is no civil war and no mass civilian casualties.

We commend the Secretary-General and the United Nations agencies for the extensive humanitarian operation under way in Afghanistan. This has saved millions of Afghan lives. Adequate external support is essential to restoring the banking and financial system, reconstructing infrastructure and reviving the economy, including by the use of the financial assets belonging to Afghanistan. Holding back such support will not promote the international community's objectives of human rights or counter-terrorism. On the contrary, it may result in the opposite. As Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs stated the day before yesterday in Davos:

“Both the international community and the interim Afghan Government need to revisit their approaches by prioritizing the interests and aspirations of ordinary Afghans.”

Together with neighbouring and other countries, Pakistan is working with the interim Afghan Government to address all issues, including the threat posed by terrorist groups. It is only through persistent, patient and prudent engagement that the international community can achieve the shared objectives of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

The question arises on how to protect civilians when the suppression of civilians is the very object of a military's operations. This is the case when foreign occupation forces resort to the forcible denial of the right of peoples to self-determination and seek to perpetuate their illegal occupation. This is vividly illustrated in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir,

where the objective of the 900,000 Indian troops is to suppress the demand of the Kashmiri people for freedom and their legitimate right to self-determination, which has been promised to them in the resolutions of the Security Council.

Since 5 August 2019, Indian troops have been stationed in every city, town, village and neighbourhood of occupied Kashmir in order to impose what India's leaders have themselves ominously referred to as a final solution for Jammu and Kashmir. They have resorted to cordon-and-search operations, extrajudicial killing of innocent Kashmiris, collective punishments by destroying entire Kashmiri neighbourhoods and villages, violence against peaceful protestors, including the use of pellet guns that have blinded hundreds of Kashmiri children, and arbitrary detention of 13,000 young Kashmiri boys and the entire Kashmiri political leadership.

Like other colonialists, India has sought to portray the Kashmiri freedom struggle as terrorism. It is India's suppression of this legitimate struggle that violates international law and constitutes war crimes. The conviction and sentencing today by an Indian kangaroo court of the Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik is the latest illustration of Indian oppression. As my Prime Minister has declared, India can imprison Yasin Malik, but it can never imprison the idea of freedom that he symbolizes.

To consolidate its occupation, India has also embarked on transforming occupied Jammu and Kashmir from a Muslim-majority State to a Hindu-majority territory, in blatant violation of Security Council resolutions, the Fourth Geneva Conventions and international law. Indian authorities are issuing millions of fake domicile certificates to non-Kashmiris, seizing and selling off their land and gerrymandering electoral constituencies through its so-called Delimitation Commission, to reduce Muslim representation and install a Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh puppet government in Srinagar. The danger of another conflict between Pakistan and India will remain ever present until the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir is resolved.

The Secretary-General's report notes:

“The prospect of nuclear conflict, once unthinkable, is now back within the realm of possibility” (S/2022/381, *para.* 2).

This observation applies not only to the dangerous conflict now raging in Ukraine but also to a nuclearized

South Asia. Pakistan therefore urges the Secretary-General and the Security Council not to neglect the Kashmir dispute, deploy diplomacy and mobilize the political will to promote a just and peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter, Security Council resolutions and the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

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

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the United States presidency of the Security Council for having convened today's important meeting.

In his report on the protection of civilians (S/2022/381), the Secretary-General observed that armed conflicts continued to be characterized by high levels of civilian death, forced displacement, destroyed civilian objects and the damaged natural environment. Azerbaijan reiterates its strong condemnation of all violations of international humanitarian law.

During its aggression against my country since the early 1990s, Armenia committed multiple war crimes, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, massive ethnic cleansing, the extensive destruction and cultural erasure of populated areas. The scale of the brutalities is evidenced also by the almost 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan who went missing in connection with the conflict, including 719 civilians. Armenia fails to clarify the whereabouts of the missing persons who fell into its hands but have not been seen since.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the horrific massacre committed in the town of Khojaly, where, in February 1992, hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians were brutally killed by invading Armenia forces. This tragedy, which independent experts recognized as the largest and worst single atrocity of the war, was condemned internationally as a crime against humanity or an act of genocide.

The deliberate tactic of targeting the civilian population was used again by Armenian forces in the course of hostilities in the fall of 2020. Direct and indiscriminate missile attacks that struck Azerbaijani cities and districts, including with the use of internationally banned cluster bombs, killed and wounded hundreds of civilians and destroyed numerous civilian objects. The frequency and timing

of the attacks, including a series of ruthless night-time missile strikes on the residential areas in the cities of Ganja and Barda, testify to the clear intent and purpose to cause the greatest possible civilian casualties. Moreover, since the end of the war, many civilians have been killed or injured by mine explosions, as Armenia fails to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines it laid on Azerbaijan's territory.

Accountability and broader transitional justice are undeniable and must be an inevitable consequence of the offences committed. They are also essential tools to prevent the recurrence of violations and important elements for building, strengthening and sustaining peace and promoting reconciliation and development.

In conclusion, with regard to humanitarian activities, the reasons leading to the erosion of trust and the putting at risk of relief efforts, as highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, are often also rooted in attempts to advance hostile political narratives, including under the guise of feigned care for people in need and by recourse to extensive disinformation.

It is imperative that the engagement of humanitarian actors in both conflict and post-conflict situations be exclusively humanitarian in nature, not misused for political purposes, and that such engagement be in conformity with the principles of neutrality, impartiality and the consent of the country affected, while fully respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

As the Secretary-General underlined in his report, the effective protection of civilians requires much greater political will and commitment to respect international law and implement good policies and practices. That definitely must be the key objective.

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

Mrs. Maitra (India): We are obligated to take the floor again at this late hour. In the interest of time, I will be very brief.

As has become a habit these days, the representative of Pakistan, like a broken record, once again made unwarranted remarks against my country. That continuous misuse of the United Nations to propagate false and malicious propaganda against my country needs to be treated with the contempt it deserves.

However, in order to not let Pakistan get away with its repeated falsehoods, I will have to present the correct position in front of the world.

The union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have always been and will always remain integral and inalienable parts of India. That includes the areas under the illegal occupation of Pakistan. No amount of rhetoric or propaganda from any country can deny that fact. The only contribution that Pakistan can make is to stop State-sponsored terrorism.

We saw the spirited defence today by the representative of Pakistan in support of a person who has pleaded guilty to charges of terror financing. One really cannot go lower than that.

With regard to his other remarks, we will not dignify them with a response.

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

Mr. Butt (Pakistan): My delegation would like to reply to the statement just made by the representative of India.

Let us examine the points she made, beginning with the reference to Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir is not an integral part of India. It is a disputed territory, as evidenced by all United Nations maps and official United Nations documents. In its fourth preambular paragraph, resolution 47 (1948) notes the desire of India and Pakistan that

“the question of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan should be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite”.

That call for a plebiscite was reiterated in resolutions 91 (1951) and 122 (1957), among other resolutions of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan, specifically its 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949 resolutions. India accepted that decision and is bound to comply with it, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations.

So much for Jammu and Kashmir being an integral part of India. Living in that alternative reality, India continues to deny its illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. Only an occupier would oppose the implementation of Security Council resolutions that promise self-determination to the people of the

disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir. If India had any moral courage or respect for international law, it would end its reign of terror, withdraw its troops and let the Kashmiris freely decide their future in accordance with Security Council resolutions.

One can grant that India knows a lot about terrorism. It has the dubious distinction of being one of the world's pioneers and largest purveyors of State terrorism. It has instigated, sponsored and abetted State terrorism in each of its neighbouring countries, including against my own country, Pakistan.

At home, the Hindutva raj is unleashing the worst form of State-directed terrorism against all minorities. Under the current Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-Bharatiya Janata Party Government, India is being guided by a supremacist ideology that has masterminded Islamophobia in the political discourse.

One cannot expect anything new from the purveyors of Hindutva. In today's incredibly intolerant India, the Muslim minority of 200 million faces frequent lynching

by cow vigilantes and pogroms by RSS thugs, with official complicity, discriminatory citizenship laws to expel Muslims and a concerted campaign to destroy mosques and the rich Muslim heritage of India.

With such a horrendous track record in democracy, the rule of law and human rights, India surely does not deserve a place on the Security Council, or in the wider law-abiding world community.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning today's meeting, I would like to again, on behalf of the Council, thank our United Nations colleagues from the Security Council Affairs Division, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the security team, as well as our interpreters, who worked extra hours today and throughout the week to ensure the success of today's important debate.

The meeting rose at 6.30 p.m.