



Security Council

Distr.: General
25 November 2024

Original: English

Letter dated 22 November 2024 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

On 24 May 2024, the Security Council adopted resolution [2730 \(2024\)](#) in response to growing concerns about attacks, violence and threats targeting humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. In paragraph 16 (a) of resolution [2730 \(2024\)](#), the Council requested that I provide recommendations within six months on measures to prevent and respond to such incidents, to help to ensure accountability and enhance the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets.

As documented in my recent reports on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations ([A/79/78-E/2024/53](#)), the protection of civilians in armed conflict ([S/2024/385](#)) and the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel ([A/79/149](#)), humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets are increasingly exposed to serious risks while delivering critical assistance and fulfilling their mandated tasks to support people in need.

The commitment of Member States to ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets is firmly established in Security Council resolutions [868 \(1993\)](#), [1502 \(2003\)](#), [2175 \(2014\)](#) (on the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations personnel) and [2589 \(2021\)](#) (on criminal accountability for crimes committed against peacekeepers), related presidential statements ([S/25493](#), [S/PRST/1997/13](#), [S/PRST/1997/34](#) and [S/PRST/2000/4](#)), the annual General Assembly resolutions on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel (most recently resolution [78/118](#)) and Economic and Social Council resolutions on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (most recently resolution [2024/8](#)).

As we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and 25 years since the Security Council first recognized the protection of civilians as integral to international peace and security, I recall the obligation of all parties to armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and to respect and protect humanitarian personnel, premises and assets. Under international law, attacks intentionally directed against humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, and their



premises and assets, as long as they are entitled to the protection given to civilians or civilian objects under international humanitarian law, are considered a war crime.

In the Pact for the Future, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets, in accordance with their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law.

Since the inception of the Organization, the safety and security services of the United Nations have adapted to evolving operational environments. In An Agenda for Peace (A/47/277-S/24111), it was noted that innovative measures would be required to deal with the dangers facing United Nations personnel. Following the Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad, the 2003 report of the Independent Panel on the Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel in Iraq (the Ahtisaari report) contributed to the reform of the United Nations security management system through its recommendations for greater integration and coordination, the establishment and gradual operationalization of a security risk management approach by the United Nations security management system, and the establishment of the Department of Safety and Security. The 2008 report of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises Worldwide led to the development and progressive strengthening of an accountability mechanism for all security actors within the United Nations security management system. I welcome Member States' sustained support to United Nations efforts to enhance and improve the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets, required for the implementation of mandated tasks, in particular the delivery of humanitarian assistance in complex security environments.

Following the adoption of resolution 2730 (2024), the United Nations Secretariat consulted members of the United Nations security management system, members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement on enhancing the prevention of and response to incidents affecting humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. These partners have contributed to the following recommendations:

1. Respect international law and implement good practices

As at 1 November 2024, 196 States had ratified the four 1949 Geneva Conventions, including all Member States and observers. The Geneva Conventions are one of the few instruments of international law that have attained universal ratification. Many of the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols have become part of customary international law and are applicable in any armed conflict, international or non-international. This reflects a broad consensus among Member States and beyond that, even in the most challenging circumstances, humanity must be upheld; the human cost of war minimized; and survivors and victims of armed conflicts protected. Moreover, the obligation to respect international humanitarian law does not depend on reciprocity. Parties must respect international humanitarian law in all circumstances, even if their adversary does not.

Upholding and ensuring respect for international law, particularly international humanitarian law – by promoting the exchange and implementation of best practices for instance – strengthens the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets.

In addition, the risks of civilian harm posed by the use of new and emerging technologies in warfare must be continuously assessed and addressed. Their impact on parties' ability to comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution needs careful examination to uphold international humanitarian law and protect humanitarian personnel and all civilians.

Respect for international law also helps to ensure that United Nations and humanitarian organizations can "stay and deliver" and reach and assist those in need. I urge Member States to:

1.1 Reaffirm their commitment to ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets as a foundational aspect of effective humanitarian response, development, peacebuilding and peacekeeping initiatives, and highlight that their protection is critical to maintaining international peace and security.

1.2 Reaffirm the importance of international treaties and norms that enhance the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. These include the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Arms Trade Treaty, the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol, and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies and the seven United Nations road safety conventions.

1.3 I urge those Member States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol and urge existing parties to maintain their obligations under those instruments. In 1994, Member States recognized the need to ensure that deliberate attacks against, or other mistreatment of, personnel acting on behalf of the United Nations should be investigated and prosecuted and for this purpose adopted the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. In 2005, Member States adopted an Optional Protocol to the Convention, which extended the scope of the Convention to include United Nations operations intended for delivering humanitarian, political or development assistance in peacebuilding or for delivering emergency humanitarian assistance. The Convention entered into force in 1999 and currently has 95 States parties, and the Optional Protocol entered into force in 2010 and currently has 33 States parties.

I also urge Member States to:

1.4 Encourage all parties to conflicts, including armed forces, to assess the impact of their military operations and take measures to avoid and minimize incidental harm to humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets, and further encourage the monitoring and transparent recording of any incidents involving harm to the aforementioned personnel, premises and assets with a view to promoting accountability and implementing appropriate remedial actions to prevent recurrence.

1.5 Establish or strengthen national oversight bodies to monitor compliance of armed forces with operational rules protecting civilians, including humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. Such mechanisms should aim to assess incidents and recommend appropriate remedial actions, to prevent recurrence and enhance accountability.

2. Uphold principled humanitarian action and facilitate access

Preserving United Nations and humanitarian organizations' ability to conduct humanitarian operations in alignment with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (see General Assembly resolutions [46/182](#) and [58/114](#)) must remain a priority. Humanitarian principles remain an irreplaceable framework and tool to help to negotiate and gain access and ensure the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need, wherever they are and whatever the circumstances.

Numerous Security Council resolutions affirm the importance of these principles and call upon parties to respect humanitarian operations and facilitate the safe, rapid and unhindered passage of humanitarian assistance.¹ In practice, however, humanitarian organizations are still confronted with numerous measures and practices that undermine their action. These include counter-terrorism legislation and measures that may criminalize legitimate humanitarian action; the harassment or arbitrary detention of humanitarian staff for carrying out their mission; and overlapping bureaucratic and administrative impediments that unduly restrict humanitarian access. Moreover, increasing misinformation and disinformation targeting the United Nations and humanitarian organizations and their personnel affect their ability to respond to crises. This disrupts relief operations, erodes the trust of parties and communities in humanitarian organizations and threatens the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. I recommend that Member States:

2.1 Take steps to facilitate safe and secure humanitarian and other United Nations assistance efforts, including by streamlining bureaucratic and administrative processes that may unduly delay or impede the provision of humanitarian assistance. This includes expedited visa processing and customs clearance for humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel and assets, including equipment intended to help the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to manage security risks, and exemptions from taxes, duties and fees on humanitarian activities.

2.2 Implement legal and practical measures, such as humanitarian exemptions in counter-terrorism legislation and the dissemination of clear directives across security and law enforcement agencies, to facilitate the work of humanitarian personnel and protect them from violence, harassment, sanctions or punishment.

2.3 Encourage support for the effective implementation of United Nations security management system activities that enable the delivery of humanitarian and other United Nations assistance efforts through coordination between the United Nations and Member States, in accordance with relevant international and national legal provisions.

2.4 Prevent and address the spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech targeting humanitarian and United Nations organizations, including by ensuring public access to accurate and reliable information, monitoring misinformation and disinformation related to United Nations and humanitarian activities and sanctioning those responsible for spreading harmful content, in accordance with applicable laws and in keeping with applicable human rights norms and in the spirit of the Pact for the Future and the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity, developed by the United Nations Secretariat.

¹ See Security Council resolutions [2730 \(2024\)](#), [2664 \(2022\)](#), [2601 \(2021\)](#), [2573 \(2021\)](#), [2417 \(2018\)](#), [2286 \(2016\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [1894 \(2009\)](#) and [1265 \(1999\)](#).

3. Maintain consistent standards

The Security Council and Member States have access to a range of tools to influence the conduct of both State and non-State parties. It is imperative that they consistently use these tools to preserve principled humanitarian action and ensure that humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, are able to carry out the mandates they are entrusted with in a safe and effective manner, in accordance with international law, and without undue impediments. Harm inflicted on national and locally recruited personnel often receives significantly less attention than incidents involving international staff. In addition, the level of condemnation can vary depending on the source of the attack, with some cases prompting stronger reactions than others. In this regard, I urge:

3.1. Member States to systematically condemn attacks on humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets, regardless of the source of attack, and leverage diplomatic, political and other tools to protect these personnel, premises and assets, including by opening channels for dialogue.

3.2. Without prejudice to their existing obligations under relevant treaties, arms-exporting States to assess the potential that exported weapons could be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian or human rights law involving harm to humanitarian personnel or United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, or their premises or assets, or to impede humanitarian aid and deprive civilians of the essentials to survive. Where there is an overriding risk of such consequences, States should be encouraged to refrain from authorizing such exports.

3.3. The Security Council to consider measures, including those under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, where appropriate, against individuals or entities responsible for harm to humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets in violation of international law.

4. Support personnel, survivors and victims and amplify their voices

The perspectives of humanitarian and United Nations and associated personnel who are survivors or victims should inform both the development and implementation of measures to prevent and respond to incidents. In addition, their voices should be promoted in intergovernmental processes, as appropriate.

In line with General Assembly resolution [60/147](#), and to support humanitarian and United Nations and associated personnel who have experienced harm, including, in some cases, sexual violence, the Security Council and Member States should work towards ensuring that all victims of violence and conflict receive adequate redress and support. By adopting this survivor-centred approach, the Security Council could foster a consistent standard of care and accountability across different forms of conflict-related harm. I recommend that Member States:

4.1 Adopt a survivor-centred approach that seeks to empower survivors and victims of crimes and ensure that they participate meaningfully in local, national, regional and global discussions on the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. The annual briefing requested in resolution [2730 \(2024\)](#) could promote dialogue between the United Nations membership and relevant stakeholders on the risks to humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets and on progress, best

practices and challenges in preventing and addressing these risks, while providing a platform for survivors and victims to share their perspectives with the Council.

4.2 Recognize the mental health impacts of security threats and incidents on humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, who may lack access to adequate services, and support the strengthening of psychosocial resilience and trauma support among humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, including counselling, mental health services and post-incident care.

4.3 I encourage Member States, and all parties to the conflict in high-risk environments, to support and cooperate with United Nations contingency planning efforts that prevent and mitigate potential risks, ensure safe evacuation and relocation procedures, including by facilitating movement of personnel and eligible family members from their place of residence, assignment or work to another location within or beyond their country of assignment, when needed, and promote effective communication channels during emergencies, safeguarding staff and ensuring continuity of critical operations.

4.4 I recommend that Member States ensure that humanitarian and United Nations and associated personnel survivors and victims have access to timely assistance, bearing in mind that national and locally recruited humanitarian and United Nations and associated personnel are particularly exposed to safety and security incidents. Support includes medical care, rehabilitation, psychosocial assistance to protect and promote mental health and well-being, legal services and measures for social and economic inclusion, such as restoration of livelihoods, and adequate, effective and prompt compensation.

5. Embed safety and security considerations in mandates

The evolving threat landscape underscores the importance of explicitly incorporating safety and security considerations into all mandates issued by the Security Council. Adequate security capacities and capabilities, commensurate with current risks, must be ensured to protect and prevent harm to humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. I recommend that the Security Council:

5.1 Emphasize the importance of ensuring that adequate security capacities and capabilities, commensurate with current risks, are allocated to rapidly evolving mandated activities to protect United Nations and associated personnel in line with the evolving threat landscape.

5.2 In transition settings, and in alignment with Security Council resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#), consider and integrate Secretariat efforts to assess and recalibrate safety and security requirements commensurate with the threat environment.

5.3 Ensure that follow-on United Nations operations, including those conducted by United Nations country teams and supported by the Department of Safety and Security, can maintain adequate security support to facilitate humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities. This approach will ensure predictable and resilient capacities for the safety and security of United Nations personnel amid mission transitions, thereby safeguarding the effectiveness and continuity of the United Nations operations.

6. Ensure effective investigations and accountability

Reports continue to emerge of harm to humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets. Conducting investigations into these incidents and, where

applicable, ensuring that perpetrators are duly held accountable are essential to better protect United Nations and humanitarian personnel, their premises and assets. Impunity fuels further incidents and violations. I recommend that the Security Council:

6.1 In cases where humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets have been harmed, systematically request the concerned State authorities to conduct full, prompt, impartial, independent, transparent and effective investigations and to regularly report to the Security Council about the progress and outcomes of these investigations, including on measures to prevent the reoccurrence of such harm.

6.2 In cases where State authorities prove unable or unwilling to investigate allegations of serious violations of international law, consider establishing or seizing relevant existing international mechanisms to investigate these alleged violations. Where appropriate, these cases should be referred to relevant international jurisdictions, including the International Criminal Court or other tribunals, to ensure accountability.

In addition, I recommend that Member States:

6.3 Ensure that, under their domestic jurisdictions, all serious violations of international law relating to humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, premises and assets constitute crimes and that alleged perpetrators are prosecuted.

6.4 Strengthen the capacity of their national institutions to develop and carry out protocols and processes to ensure full, prompt, impartial, independent, transparent and effective investigations into allegations of serious violations of international law relating to humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, and their premises and assets. Member States should, in coordination with the United Nations, promote and strengthen international cooperation in that domain, including through the exchange of expertise and good practices, through capacity-building and technical assistance, or through the deployment of independent investigators in support of authorities that may lack sufficient capacity.

6.5 Support access of humanitarian personnel or United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, to independent legal aid, and more generally encourage organizations that pursue cases and implement initiatives aimed at improving access to justice for their staff members. Member States' support may include funding for independent legal assistance, logistical support to States initiating legal proceedings, and support for victims and witnesses protection programmes.

In keeping with my commitment to the safety and security of humanitarian, United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, which I have raised before the Security Council in recent months, I will continue to advocate for ensuring accountability and enhancing their protection and that of United Nations premises and assets.

I would be grateful if you could bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**