



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8534th meeting
Thursday, 23 May 2019, 10 a.m.
New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Marsudi/Mr. Djani/Mr. Syihab (Indonesia)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
France	Mr. Delattre
Germany	Mr. Annen
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen/Mr. Clay
United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373)

Letter dated 8 May 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/385)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373)

Letter dated 8 May 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/385)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Georgia, Guatemala, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, the Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Peter Mauer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; Her Excellency Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations; and Ms. Clare Hutchinson, Special

Representative of the NATO Secretary-General for Women, Peace and Security.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

It is so decided.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/373, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I also wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/385, which contains the text of a letter dated 8 May 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I wish to warmly welcome His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres, to whom I now give the floor.

The Secretary-General: I thank the Government of Indonesia for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. And it is with enormous pleasure that I see with us Peter Mauer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, guardian of the Geneva Conventions. It also marks the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda, a response to the Council's "deep concern" at the erosion of respect for international humanitarian law.

However, while the normative framework has been strengthened, compliance has deteriorated. We are rightly critical when assessing the state of the protection

of civilians, for there is great cause for concern. But let us first recall that we have seen some progress over the past 20 years. A culture of protection has taken root, in the Security Council and across the United Nations. To use the Council's own words, the protection of civilians is "one of the core issues" on its agenda. A comprehensive protection framework now exists, based on international law and Security Council practice.

The protection of children, and of all civilians, from loathsome acts of sexual violence in conflict has been strengthened through the deployment of specialist advisers in peace operations, thereby reinforcing the work of humanitarian agencies. Monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in conflicts and engagement with warring parties has led to the demobilization and reintegration of thousands of children.

Security Council-mandated United Nations peace operations have protected and saved countless civilian lives. In South Sudan, nearly 200,000 internally displaced people are currently sheltering at sites for the protection of civilians. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations Mission has supported local peace and ceasefire agreements that are monitored by civilian and military components. Civilian casualty recording by the United Nations in Afghanistan has led to the adoption of measures by pro-Government forces to minimize harm. Millions of civilians receive cross-border humanitarian assistance in Syria. And war criminals, from Cambodia to the former Yugoslavia, have been tried and convicted.

Security Council resolutions on the protection of medical care in armed conflict and on conflict and hunger have given important focus and urgency to these issues. I look forward to working with Member States to ensure they are implemented.

But, despite those advances, grave human suffering is still being caused by armed conflicts and a lack of compliance with international humanitarian law. As my report (S/2019/373) underlines, civilians continue to make up the vast majority of casualties in conflict. In 2018 alone, the United Nations recorded the death or injury of more than 22,800 civilians in just six countries — Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. In Idlib, in north-west Syria, we saw a new wave of shelling and airstrikes against hospitals, schools, markets and camps for the

displaced, killing, wounding and creating panic among the civilian population.

In all conflicts, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 90 per cent of those killed or injured were civilians. Overall, approximately 1.4 million people were newly displaced across international borders, while a further 5.2 million were internally displaced. Widespread access constraints jeopardized humanitarian and medical assistance to civilians in need. Violence against humanitarian and medical workers and facilities persisted. The World Health Organization recorded 705 attacks against health-care workers and facilities in just eight conflicts, resulting in 451 deaths and 860 injuries. Three hundred and sixty-nine aid workers were kidnapped, wounded or killed. And starvation of civilians was used as a method of warfare, as were rape and sexual violence.

Chief among our challenges is enhancing and ensuring respect and compliance for international humanitarian law in the conduct of hostilities. In many cases, our information suggests that respect for these bodies of law is at best questionable; in others, and as detailed in several of my country-specific reports, we have witnessed blatant violations. Nonetheless, there are examples where warring parties respect the law and are implementing precautions, collateral damage estimation and other efforts to minimize the impact of fighting on civilians. Those practices must be implemented effectively and standardized across parties and theatres of operation.

Greater attention must be paid to those who are already vulnerable during peace time — such as the elderly, children and the disabled — who are rendered all the more vulnerable and in need of protection during flight and conflict. We must also take urgent action to reduce the humanitarian impact of urban warfare, and in particular of explosive weapons. Member States should do more to condition arms exports on respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law. And they must call for greater respect for the law and protection of civilians by parties to conflict, and in particular, partner forces, including in the context of multinational coalition operations. We also need greater progress on accountability by closing the gap between allegations of serious violations and their investigation and prosecution.

Progress is needed most at the national level. My report recommends action in three areas: first,

developing national policy frameworks that establish clear institutional authorities and responsibilities for the protection of civilians in armed conflict; secondly, principled and sustained engagement by humanitarian organizations and others with non-State armed groups to negotiate safe and timely humanitarian access and promote compliance with the law; and, thirdly, ensuring accountability for serious violations.

As a practical matter, the Security Council can do much to enhance compliance with the laws of war. That includes providing financial and technical assistance to support the investigation and prosecution of war crimes in conflict-affected States.

We also need action at the global and multilateral levels. For the Security Council, that means being more consistent in how it addresses protection concerns within and across different conflicts and being more comprehensive in terms of, for example, grappling with the protection of urban warfare. It also means keeping today's conversation going, with Member States, United Nations actors and civil society engaging on a sustained basis to implement the actions I have outlined.

For, as bleak as the current state of protection is, there is considerable scope for improvement if we each do our utmost to promote and implement the rules that bind us to preserve humanity in war. This is the best way that we can honour the twentieth anniversary of the protection agenda. We have the rules and laws of war. We all now need to work to enhance compliance.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mauer.

Mr. Mauer: We thank Indonesia for its stewardship of this debate and we note with appreciation its continued support in hosting an important regional conference for armed forces in Jakarta in a few weeks from today. We trust the conference will follow the debate here and lead to further efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians through better peacekeeping.

Madam President, we appreciate your country's and your personal commitment to this issue, in particular your focus on a strengthened role for women in peacekeeping. I also thank the Secretary-General for his strong leadership in highlighting the critical protection gaps with which we are confronted today.

Twenty years ago, the Security Council invited the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to brief it on the protection of civilians (see S/PV.3977) and adopted a presidential statement that further welcomed its contribution to this issue (see S/PRST/1999/6). The past two decades have shown us how the political and military decisions made in this Chamber impact the human conditions on battlefields around the world. These decisions can save lives or end them; they can create hope or misery; and they can bolster or break the norms that protect universal humanitarian laws and principles — whether a city is bombed to rubble or whether civilians and hospitals are spared; whether children are sent to school or recruited into armed groups; whether prisoners are tortured or treated with decency; whether families ever hear from their loved ones again.

Not only are the decisions of all United Nations Member States and especially those of the Security Council important; the absence of decisions by the Council also takes its toll on civilians. On battlefields, where the ICRC is present today, too many actors take the absence of political convergence among Council members as a free ride for military operations without any limitations and without accountability. Seventy years after the universal ratification of the Geneva Conventions; more than 40 years after the adoption of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions; and 20 years after the Security Council held its first protection of civilians debate, we are still seeing outrageous violations on a daily basis.

While we understand that political consensus is difficult, we ask the Council to be clearer in its support for respect for international humanitarian law and in stating and following through on the simple truth that no one is above the law and no civilian can be excluded from protection. Today, in the face of changing conflict dynamics, international humanitarian law and international human rights law continue to be the bedrock.

Humanitarian action is adapting to people's changing needs, and we call on States to adapt, too, by prioritizing the protection of civilians; by upholding international humanitarian law and influencing their partners to do so; by setting clearer frameworks for their troops and for those supported; by setting clearer ground rules; by vetting, training and instructing partners; by applying the highest standards of precaution in weapons transfers; and by setting up clear

oversight and accountability frameworks. Through these measures, the Council can influence behaviour and protect populations exposed to war and violence.

This debate must be anchored in the experiences and needs of people and communities who suffer the daily brutalities of war and violence. Measures must be taken that protect civilians not only from physical harm but also from invisible, psychological harm; from abuses like sexual violence or torture in detention; or from not knowing the fate of missing loved ones.

We must also move beyond a victim mind-set to understanding people and communities as agents of their own protection and experts of their own situations. They have individual needs, but they also have individual skills, capacities and enormous resilience. They do not wait for external interventions to address the problems and threats they face. They decide how best to travel in groups and to ensure that children, older people and people with disabilities are not left behind during flight, choosing in advance which road to take, discussing locations to avoid and negotiating directly with weapons-bearers. Connectivity has strengthened the possibilities for self-protection measures and we all need to adapt to these new developments.

While we ask more of the members of the security Council and the international community at large, we ask at the very least that they do not hinder people in need in their effort to protect themselves. Too often, we see that in addition to being exposed to war and violence, populations are stopped from reaching safer spaces, constrained by bureaucratic obstacles and limited in their free movement.

In putting people at the centre, we can see that protective layers must be built across three interconnected spheres in which proactive policies and practices of protection are needed; these are the individual, community and contextual levels. When an individual faces immediate threats to safety and dignity, harm can be greatly reduced through strict adherence to the rules regulating the use of force, through more stringent arms controls and through humane treatment in transfers of detainees and in detention.

We cannot gloss over the issue of missing people. Hundreds of thousands of people — if not millions — are missing worldwide. Their family members suffer deep losses and unanswered questions, their pain only deepening with time. Such festering wounds can harm the fabric of whole societies, undermining relations

between groups and nations, sometimes decades after the original events.

For the sake of individuals, and whole communities, the humanitarian imperative is clear. Families have a right to know the fate of their loved ones and States must take steps to prevent people from going missing in the first place, for instance by registering detainees and notifying their families. The ICRC and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement overall stand ready to support States in these efforts.

The ICRC has made specific efforts to ensure that community-based protection approaches are integrated more systematically into its response. This is part of our commitment to being accountable to affected populations. Importantly, these activities can never be considered a substitute for the protection responsibilities of authorities, and States must put measures in place to protect their population, in line with their obligations under the law. Communities need space to protect themselves and States must be more proactive in granting it.

The ICRC is looking to build on our role of neutral intermediary to support these activities, for example in supporting communities to self-advocate to authorities or weapon bearers in order to ensure their safety as they go about their daily lives, collecting food and water, seeking medical help, attending schools and more. The ICRC also organizes information sessions for families on their legal rights so they can themselves approach authorities.

Additionally, the ICRC is broadening its assistance to create stronger communities through micro-economic projects aimed at reducing exposure to risk, distributing seeds that can be grown in towns to avoid women being assaulted while going to the field, or providing income-generating activities to reduce harmful behaviour such as sending children out to work. Protections in fragile settings will also require broader investments that go beyond the work of humanitarian actors, such as the restoration of markets and enabling sustainable economic activities.

In the wider context of protection, with increasingly urbanized warfare, it has become starkly evident that the effects of bombing and shelling in cities are almost never limited to military targets. In densely populated areas, the wide-area impact of heavy explosive weapons is now well known and their use against targets that are smaller than their area effects is all too often ethically

and maybe even often legally indefensible. The price is too high to be justified; beyond the deaths and injuries of civilians, we see damaged infrastructure leading to the collapse of essential health and water systems and more.

It is not only civilian infrastructure that is harmed; the environmental consequences of conflict are often overlooked. International humanitarian law protects the natural environment as a civilian object. This includes vital natural resources that, if damaged, can have implications not only for the survival of the civilian populations, but also for environmental risks.

The ICRC this year will release updated guidelines on international humanitarian law and the natural environment. We will be engaging with militaries about these guidelines, and with parties to the conflict to ensure practical measures are taken that protect the natural environment.

We are also seeing gaping protection risks and vulnerabilities in the digital environment. People may face hate crimes, violence, discrimination, digital surveillance and profiling because of their online presence and/or use of digital technologies, including by Governments, the private sector and other non-State actors. In conflict zones, this can be lethal. Data collected on affected people, including through humanitarian operations, must not become a source of additional risk for populations or humanitarian organizations. States should promote a do-no-harm approach, backed by accountability mechanisms, for the responsible use of technologies and data.

Twenty years after the International Committee of the Red Cross first addressed the protection of civilians in the Council (see S/PV.3977), violations and abuses continue. Let us work together to respond on these three levels: individual, community and the wider context. As we mark the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions this year, we urge States to recall their spirit, which is to uphold human dignity in the midst of armed conflict.

The President: I thank Mr. Mauer for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Borello.

Mr. Borello: I thank you, Madam President, and the Government of Indonesia for inviting me to address the Security Council at this important open debate.

I am honoured to address the Council on behalf of my colleagues at the Center for Civilians in Conflict, especially as the Council marks 20 years since placing the protection of civilians on its agenda and the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

Sixteen years ago, a young woman named Marla Ruzicka, the founder of the organization I lead, made it her mission to document the impact of conflict on civilians. Marla worked tirelessly to collect the testimonies of civilians harmed by conflict and bring their stories to policymakers. Tragically, Marla herself became a victim of war, killed in 2005 in Iraq. But her ideas live on — that civilians are not collateral damage; that they deserve recognition, especially in times of conflict; and that those who go to war have it in their power to spare civilians from its worst effects.

Today's open debate is a pivotal moment to reflect on the past 20 years and to set out an ambitious and concrete vision for the future. On that note, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the joint statement issued by 22 non-governmental organizations in advance of this open debate. The statement makes an urgent call to strengthen the protection of civilians. This is a make-or-break moment. The situation is not hopeless, but we need action by the Security Council, the United Nations and all Governments to reduce the suffering experienced by millions of civilians caught in conflict.

I wish to focus my comments on three important topics: minimizing civilian harm in conflict; protecting civilians through peacekeeping; and engaging communities on their own protection.

Over the past 16 years, we have worked directly with armed actors and civilians to find solutions to civilian harm. In Afghanistan, Nigeria and Ukraine, important strides are being made, many of them through the development of national policies on civilian protection. Every Government should have such a national policy, and that policy should include six key elements.

First, we must have a strong gender lens, recognizing that women, men, girls and boys experience conflict differently and that they must all be protected equally.

Secondly, we must create specific capabilities to track, analyse and respond to civilian harm. These capabilities have had an impact in reducing harm in contexts like Afghanistan and Somalia.

Thirdly, we must make a commitment to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in urban areas. I strongly urge all nations to support a political declaration on this issue this year.

Fourthly, we must prioritize civilian protection in arms transfers and security partnerships. Rigorous safeguards are needed, especially where there are risks of violations by partners.

Fifthly, we need dedicated training on the protection of civilians within national military education systems.

Sixthly, we must find a way for civilians to receive acknowledgement, amends and accountability for the harm they have suffered in conflict.

There is no substitute for high-level and public political commitment to civilian protection. This is why we fully echo the call of the Secretary-General on all Member States — including the members of the Council — to adopt national policies on the protection of civilians.

Twenty years ago, the Council endowed the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone with the first explicit mandate to protect civilians. Since 1999, United Nations missions have been an essential tool in protecting civilians and interrupting cycles of violence that threaten international peace and security. There is currently no other kind of operation that can bring to bear the comprehensive set of capabilities to protect civilians that a United Nations operation can. In South Sudan, a woman living in a protection of civilians site powerfully expressed this, telling us: “This living soul talking to you now is because of the protection provided by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.”

Yet, United Nations missions are beset by recurring challenges that have been identified across consecutive reform efforts since 1999. The Council, Member States and the United Nations can help in three main ways: providing political support, adequate financial resources and the right capabilities.

First, diplomacy and political action are urgently needed to support United Nations operations in contexts where Governments or non-State actors threaten civilians and peacekeepers.

Secondly, Member States and the United Nations must ensure that mandates are matched with resources. Pressure on peacekeeping budgets has undermined efforts to protect civilians. In the Congo, after a base

of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was closed following budget and troop reductions, a woman told us that she felt that “even the United Nations has abandoned us”.

Thirdly, United Nations operations need the right mix of civilian, military and police capabilities. These include well-trained, equipped and rapidly deployable contingents, expert civilian staff and appropriate enablers, such as vital air assets. Without these essential ingredients, peacekeeping operations will continue to struggle to deliver on their mandates to protect civilians. Action on critical peacekeeping reforms is essential in 2019.

I want to end by discussing the critical work of engaging communities on their own protection. We strongly believe that engaging communities in a safe, effective and meaningful way is essential to national and international efforts to bring peace and stability in conflict. Civilians are not just victims in armed conflict; they are often the best stewards of their own protection. They can devise and implement highly effective solutions. We have seen communities demand and obtain armed escorts for women leaving their homes to gather firewood. We have seen community leaders convince both parties to a conflict to agree to a daily ceasefire that allowed civilians to go about their daily lives. We have seen girls return to the classroom as a result of advocacy by their own communities with armed actors.

Efforts to protect civilians and resolve conflict will more likely succeed if undertaken in full consultation and partnership with civilians and communities. Community engagement should empower and support existing community-based protection initiatives and abide by the do-no-harm principle. Furthermore, community engagement should be conflict and gender sensitive and ensure equal opportunities for all civilians to voice and address differing protection concerns. Finally, engagement cannot be a substitute for State and non-State actors upholding their obligations under international law.

Twenty years ago, the Council made a solemn commitment to protecting civilians in armed conflict. There has been much progress, but to the people of Syria, Yemen, Mali and the Central African Republic, and civilians caught in too many other conflicts, that commitment remains unfulfilled. I strongly urge the

members of the Council, the Secretary-General and all Governments to take concrete action to strengthen the protection of civilians. The days of accepting civilian casualties as an unwelcome but unavoidable consequence of conflict must end. Parties to conflict can minimize civilian harm and Governments can prioritize the protection of civilians. With the right support, peacekeeping operations can support civilians. Safe, meaningful and effective community engagement can lead to better protection on the ground.

With committed leadership at the global level by the United Nations, the political will of all Governments and the engagement of affected communities, a higher standard of protection can be achieved. We all can do more to protect civilians in armed conflict, and, because we can, we must.

The President: I thank Mr. Borello for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

Indonesia welcomes this opportunity to preside over today's open debate marking the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of the first-ever resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict — resolution 1265 (1999) — and coinciding with seventieth anniversary of the Fourth Geneva Convention — part of the backbone of international humanitarian law.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict has been an integral part of Indonesia's constitutional mandate and foreign policy, and sets the tone for the theme of our Security Council presidency, namely, "Investing in peace". Over the years, we have been unwavering in advocating the protection of human rights and humanitarian access for civilians in conflict and post-conflict situations. I have made this position crystal clear in addressing, *inter alia*, the recent situations in Palestine, Syria, and Yemen. In situations of conflict, the safety and security of civilians, the safety and security of people, must always come first. In other words, the protection of civilians must continue to underpin our work at the Security Council.

Yet the path leading towards that noble objective continues to be plagued with challenges. As the Secretary-General has reported, the state of civilian protection today remains similar to that of 20 years ago. That is truly a source of concern. Under the mandate of the Charter of the United Nations, all 15 countries

represented around this table bear the collective responsibility to end and reverse that travesty.

The adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) was a truly momentous achievement. It affirms the Council's commitment to humankind in line with the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention. Over the years, the world has come to a better understanding on the multidimensional nature of this agenda, from addressing physical threats to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and from peacekeeping to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In order to strengthen the implementation of the protection of civilians agenda, there are some pertinent points worth considering.

First, the national capacities of the concerned must be strengthened. The task of protecting civilians lies primarily in the hands of the State concerned, particularly with regard to upholding the rule of law and establishing good governance. However, as States in conflict often have limited capacity to do so, international partnerships become crucial to address the root causes of the conflicts and enable them to emerge from conflict into a better, more secure future. Moreover, community engagement and empowerment also play an important role in developing national capacities.

In that regard, civilian protection programmes should be tailor-made to the needs of affected communities. Local leaders and community members, especially women, must become part of the design and implementation of such programmes. Recognizing that women and children face the highest risks in situations of conflict, the participation of women in such programmes will help increase their effectiveness. For its part, Indonesia has been proactive in efforts to empower Palestinian communities to allow them to gain better access to basic needs. Just three years ago, we built a hospital in Gaza that has provided much-needed health-care and eased the suffering of civilians living under the occupation.

Secondly, ensuring effective implementation and compliance is key. We already have in place the normative frameworks guiding the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, namely, the Fourth Geneva Convention and a number of United Nations resolutions. The challenge now is how to effectively implement them. That ultimately requires respect for international humanitarian and human rights laws by State and non-State actors alike. To that end, we

believe that engagement with all parties to a conflict is crucial to encourage them to implement the existing legal frameworks.

Thirdly, we must pursue innovative and practical ways to protect civilians on the ground. As the front line, United Nations peacekeepers and humanitarian actors remain our primary agents. As such, the skill sets and capacities of peacekeepers and humanitarian actors must continuously be updated and strengthened so that they can be better equipped in tackling new and emerging challenges on the ground.

Based on the experience of Indonesia's peacekeepers, mastery of soft-skills, or people-to-people skills, has been demonstrated to positively contribute to building the trust of local communities. Furthermore, intelligence-gathering skills are necessary to ensuring the success of early-warning systems to detect and prevent potential humanitarian crises.

The twentieth anniversary of the first Security Council resolution on the protection of civilians should serve as a reminder not only of our political commitments, but also our duty to implement those commitments to ensure the primacy of human safety and security. After all, the United Nations was established upon the mandate "we the peoples of the United Nations". We cannot afford to let our people down.

I now resume my functions as President of the security Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Annen (Germany): I thank you, Madam President, for convening today's debate. We highly appreciate Indonesia's commitment to the multilateral order and the strengthening of international law. Rest assured that Germany is with you in this crucial endeavour.

We are also glad to align ourselves with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Switzerland on behalf the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

Like our briefers today, I am frustrated and saddened that, in the seventieth year of the Geneva Conventions, we still have to condemn direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the deliberate targeting of places of education, hospitals and other services essential to civilian populations by parties

to conflicts all over the world — in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and the Central African Republic, to name just some examples. In addition, sexual violence, rape terror and starvation — deeply despicable methods of warfare — are still being used, and those who attempt to help those most in need are attacked on a daily basis.

I believe that I speak for all of us here today by thanking all humanitarian and medical personnel for their dedication and service. In the north-western part of Syria — in Idlib — the recent heavy bombardments, including attacks on humanitarian and civilian infrastructure, have led to the loss of life of too many innocent civilians, including health workers. I agree with what Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said here in this very Chamber, namely, that,

"some of those attacks are clearly organized by people with access to sophisticated weapons, including a modern air force and so-called smart and precision weapons." (*S/PV.8527, p. 4*)

It bears repeating that the fight against terrorism can in no way justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Counter-terrorism operations do not override the responsibility of parties to protect civilians, nor should they impede impartial humanitarian action.

I am also deeply worried about the deteriorating situation of journalists and interpreters, as for example in Afghanistan, as well as in Syria and Yemen. Impeding their work is often a particularly cynical way of covering up grave human rights violations.

All in all, we live in a world where the accomplishments of earlier generations in guaranteeing at least a basic respect for the human rights of civilians, who have come increasingly under attack, as Mr. Borello and Mr. Mauer made very clear. We must not acquiesce to that. It is the Council's task to safeguard international humanitarian law, to create the legal framework for the protection of civilians and to be consistent in implementing its own resolutions. All of us must live up to that.

In the light of that distressing state of affairs, allow me to encourage the Secretary-General to continue to speak up loudly when it comes to violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to use his good offices whenever he can to prevent those violations

from happening in the first place. He can count on Germany's support.

Germany decided to use its term on the Security Council to advance the protection of civilians. Just in April, within the framework of our twin presidencies with France, we initiated the drafting of a humanitarian call for action for which we will be seeking broad support within the membership. In September, the General Assembly will provide us with an opportunity to do so. We also introduced a resolution on sexual violence in conflict (resolution 2467 (2019)), strengthening a survivor-centred approach, protection and accountability. We invited the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner for Refugees to brief the Council on protection concerns, and we presided over a meeting of the Council where for the first time a refugee with disabilities was able to share her views on the challenges facing people with special needs in a conflict setting (see S/PV.8515).

Undoubtedly, the international community has taken a number of important steps in the past 20 years, including the establishment of the International Criminal Court and, more recently, other accountability mechanisms; stronger focus on protection of civilians in peacekeeping mandates; and the development of the powerful children and armed conflict monitoring and reporting system.

But we still have a long way to go. We, as States and the international community, have to step up our efforts to build on those achievements and do better. In that regard, I would like to share four concrete proposals.

First, international law is weakened when violations go unpunished. That is why Germany is a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court. That is why we support the commissions of inquiry set up by the Human Rights Council and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, set up by the General Assembly; the mechanism for Myanmar and the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. It is important that those mechanisms also address the actions of non-State armed groups. We must enforce international law, making the fight against impunity

a reality and preventing further atrocities by bringing perpetrators, wherever they come from, to justice.

Secondly, the protection of civilians is a key task of many peacekeeping missions. For the protection of civilians to become a reality and not remain a lofty ambition of us here in New York, we must collectively work towards that goal. That starts with turning the protection of civilians into a priority for us Member States, the United Nations, the host nation and the whole mission — military, police and civilians alike — as well as for all United Nations staff deployed in mission settings.

In addition, peace missions need to be adequately resourced. We need to ensure that a sufficient number of posts for protection personnel are provided to the missions, in particular child and women protection advisers, as well as for early warning and community alert systems, for liaison arrangements and public information, for human rights monitoring and for programmatic funding to support the missions' work. That includes strengthening the host countries' capacities to fulfil their responsibility in protecting civilians through the rule of law and security sector reform.

A systematic gender analysis of protection facilitates better understanding of the needs of civilians and allows for the development of strategies that meet the specific protection needs of women, men and children. Furthermore, troop- and police-contributing countries need to prepare their personnel more effectively for the task of protecting civilians. That includes conveying a thorough understanding of local conflict dynamics, as well as promoting clear adherence to United Nations standards and protection of civilian policies, including on how to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence.

Raising the number of women in peace missions is also an essential part of the protection of civilians. The participation of women enables a closer relationship to local communities, particularly women, and contributes to trust-building, which is an essential precondition for protection. Germany has announced several initiatives to increase the number of female peacekeepers in United Nations peace missions.

Thirdly, we need to better care for humanitarian and medical workers in armed conflict and to strengthen humanitarian negotiation capacities. Tailored trainings and confidential spaces for humanitarian front-line

workers to discuss their experiences with each other are promising approaches. We need to scale them up.

Finally, red lines have to be drawn for the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Germany has initiated a dialogue series in Geneva, bringing together military practitioners, diplomats and humanitarian actors to work out best practices on how to minimize civilian casualties in urban theatres of conflict. We are glad that many States and the International Committee of the Red Cross are playing a leading role in that joint endeavour.

In his report, the Secretary-General observes that “the state of the protection of civilians today is tragically similar to 20 years ago” (*S/2019/373, para. 4*). That is a damning assessment for the Council; it is a damning assessment for all of us. Let us therefore join forces to ensure that the next report will come to a more positive conclusion.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): A century ago, when international humanitarian law was still in its infancy, civilians represented only 10 to 15 per cent of the total casualties in armed conflict. Today, civilians account for more than 80 per cent of all casualties. As we sit here today, civilians are bearing the brunt of conflicts in Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Libya, the Lake Chad basin and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The international community’s failure to prevent mass atrocities, such as the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 and the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, remains a stain on our collective conscience. Anyone witnessing the bombing of schools and hospitals in Idlib or the plight of children starving to death in Yemen might be forgiven for wondering why we have not made no progress since those dark days.

We need to keep strengthening the normative framework and support robust protection for the needs of specific groups who are particularly at risk in conflict situations. Much progress has been made in recent years on the protection of groups such as women and girls, children, internally displaced persons, refugees, journalists and media professionals but it is important that we continue to examine where further developments can be made. That is why we are very proud to be working in the Council with Poland on a draft resolution on persons with disabilities in armed conflict. I very much agree with what the Minister of Germany said with regard to the need for us to be examining the use of high explosives in urban areas.

However, our priority should be to redouble our efforts to ensure implementation of established international humanitarian law and the Council’s resolutions on the protection of civilians and to combat impunity. The protection of civilians should be integrated into the Council’s approach to country situations, for example, in monitoring the ceasefire around Al-Hudaydah in Yemen. In some cases, out of necessity, we may need to carve out separate humanitarian tracks from wider conflict resolution efforts, such as cross-border authorizations in Syria. But we must be clear that that cannot substitute for supporting efforts to find viable long-term political solutions to conflict.

Eight of the 14 United Nations peacekeeping missions operating around the world are mandated to protect civilians. We need to work to ensure that wider efforts to improve peacekeeping performance in general include a specific focus on improving the protection of civilians. Better mandating, as we have been asked by the Secretary-General in his Action for Peacekeeping agenda, is of course part of that. But ensuring that protection elements in mandates are translated into clear tasks on the ground will require mission leadership and personnel to understand the practical implementation and implications of their protection duties. There needs to be an integrated approach in missions and across the United Nations if protection strategies are to come off the page and onto the ground.

All troop- and police-contributing countries also need to ensure that their uniformed personnel are trained to the required core standards on the protection of civilians. That is a key part of operational readiness. Peace enforcement operations, mandated or supported by the Council, such as the African Union Mission in Somalia and the Group of Five for the Sahel, must also have strong training and compliance frameworks. It would be good to make sure that the Department of Peace Operations is working with those troop- and police-contributing countries to understand how such training can be most effective and report back on it so that Member States, both trainers and trainees, can improve their performance.

The Council should receive regular reporting on mission performance in relation to the protection of civilians, as part of the wider performance reporting under resolution 2436 (2018). Where serious protection failures arise within missions, we will continue to support the Secretariat in holding individuals,

contingents and mission leadership accountable and to make sure that we all learn lessons.

I agree very much with you, Madam President, that protection is not only a matter for United Nations peacekeeping missions. The primary responsibility to protect all civilians on their territory of course rests with host States — States Members of the United Nations. In order for peace to be enduring and sustainable, host State authorities and civil society actors all have a role to play. I agree very much with what Federico Borello had to say about the need for national plans. The United Kingdom has a human security policy for our armed forces, and we have published a voluntary national review on the domestic implementation of international humanitarian law. We are very happy to work with anyone else interested in such an approach. In that context, we welcome the focus on the role of local communities in today's open debate, as they not only have an important voice in conflict resolution but are best placed to understand their own environments. We need to hear more from them.

Turning to accountability, whatever progress is made on implementation, strengthening the protection of civilians over the next 20 years will also depend on how we collectively address the issue of accountability, including, of course, in the Council. Combating impunity is partly about establishing robust mechanisms for justice and accountability. In some cases, international mechanisms, such as the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Court, sanctions regimes and the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which we set up in Iraq, will be the best tools at our disposal. In other cases, accountability can best be delivered through domestic or hybrid mechanisms, such as the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic or the establishment of a hybrid court, as provided for in the South Sudan peace agreement. We can also achieve accountability through national prosecution. I hope very much that those gathering evidence of crimes in Syria or against the Rohingya will one day see that evidence presented in effective tribunals in Syria and Myanmar. But if not, those responsible should be held to account wherever national law permits.

Accountability is about doing what is right by the victims and survivors of atrocities against civilians, but it is also a key condition for building sustainable peace. If post-conflict efforts to establish good governance,

security and the rule of law and, crucially, to maintain peace, are to succeed, then accountability is vital for the rebuilding of trust and confidence between civilian populations and the parties to the conflict.

Let me conclude by saying that the Council has an important role to play. When we receive reports about attacks on civilians, schools, hospitals and medical facilities, we need collectively and individually to be ready to say what we see and to say who is behind it. It can be uncomfortable to do so. It can cut across political priorities or international friendships. But, for the sake of all, we must do it. After all, if we do not speak up for other countries' civilians when they are attacked, who will speak up for our own?

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): On behalf of the African members of the Security Council — Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa — I would like to thank the Indonesian presidency for organizing today's important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to thank you, Madam President, for presiding over it, knowing how keen you are and how much you care about the subject.

The African members of the Security Council align themselves with the statement to be made later by Ambassador Fatima Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

Africa is a major stakeholder in today's debate. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and the briefers for their comprehensive presentations, which undoubtedly underscore that civilians not only continue to account for the vast majority of casualties during conflict but also bear the brunt of the short- and long-term impact of conflict — from the denial of, and attacks on, humanitarian assistance to all forms of violence and forced displacement.

Today's debate is timely, as 2019 marks the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 — a cornerstone of international humanitarian law — and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1270 (1999). Those landmark components of international law have framed the approach of the United Nations to the protection of civilians in the contemporary age. However, the implementation of those legal frameworks is still lacking.

While we have seen a significant improvement in the compliance by State actors with such provisions,

the changing nature of modern conflict — shifting from inter-State conflict to civil wars, transnational conflicts and instability — has meant that the protection of civilians has become more and more challenging. Nevertheless, while recalling respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and recognizing the leadership role of States in protecting, nurturing and advancing the protection of civilians agenda, we would like to acknowledge the important role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross as custodian of international humanitarian law and in attempting to regulate the conduct of armed conflict in order to protect the most vulnerable caught in the middle of such conflicts. We would also like to acknowledge the significant role that the Center for Civilians in Conflict plays by working with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to mitigate and respond to civilian harm.

The role of the Security Council in pursuit of international humanitarian law should lead it to take decisive action to facilitate the necessary environment, including by establishing humanitarian corridors and ceasefires and deploying peacekeepers with a robust protection-of-civilians mandate. Such actions are necessary to create the conditions for sustained action on peace and security and ensure that the humanitarian-development nexus thrives. Furthermore, greater coordination and cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, such as the African Union, are necessary to create an environment that would enable the protection of civilians. The comparative advantage of regional organizations can enable closer collaboration and coordination with local communities, including by creating an environment conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons on a voluntary basis, in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement.

The protection of civilians requires not only physical protection, but also liaising and engagement with communities to ensure that the necessary environment is created to facilitate long-term protection mechanisms. The African members of the Security Council believe in that regard that the strength of the multidimensional nature of peacekeeping missions is paramount in creating proactive approaches to protecting civilians through military engagements, and also in consolidating the gains made in permanently eliminating threats to innocent populations.

Nevertheless, we wish to underline that, while it remains the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians, including humanitarian personnel and health workers, within their borders, all parties — including armed opposition groups — must also bear the responsibility of ensuring that civilians and health workers are protected. All parties to a conflict should fully comply with their obligations under international law, as stated in resolution 2286 (2016).

It is also important to highlight the fact that the protection of civilians is a multidisciplinary agenda. It includes contributing activities of the United Nations, regional organizations such as the African Union, international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, non-governmental organizations, the military component, the civilian component, and the host Government and its security forces. Efforts to address the protection of civilians agenda, therefore, need to involve close coordination by all role-players.

It is also important to note that, among the civilian population, vulnerable groups such as women and children are affected the most. Therefore, we call for the full implementation of the provisions of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2427 (2018), as well as subsequent resolutions, particularly with regard to the protection of women and children in armed conflict. That also requires the strengthening and mainstreaming of special provisions and personnel within peacekeeping missions to ensure that those groups are adequately protected.

In order to deter the threats to civilians and foster greater compliance with international law, the African members of the Council believe that the necessary accountability mechanisms and the policy space and technical support to develop them are essential. Those include local, national and regional accountability mechanisms. Broader international mechanisms should continue to support accountability mechanisms, based on complementarity and subsidiarity. However, the most effective ways to protect civilians are to prevent armed conflict through investments in sustainable development, promote the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts, and consolidate peace by focusing on the post-conflict environment and peacebuilding, which is a responsibility charged to all of us in the Council.

The Council often finds itself hamstrung from acting based on competing geopolitical interests that we are deeply concerned about. Nothing should prevent

the Council from acting decisively when it comes to protecting those caught in the middle of armed conflicts. The protection of civilians should remain a priority and requires the commitment of all Council members.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): I commend the convening of this important meeting and thank the speakers for their valuable briefings. I should also like to thank, in particular, Minister Annen and you, Madam, for your presence today.

Seventy years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions and 20 years after the Council placed the protection of civilians at the centre of its agenda, it is still relevant — perhaps more than ever — to address the impact of armed conflicts on the civilian population, as well as the serious human consequences that derive from violations of international humanitarian law. It is still relevant also because in too many existing contexts, defenceless populations are caught in the middle of confrontations between non-State armed groups or under the yoke of terrorist groups that respond to no rule other than the use of those populations to further their nefarious aspirations.

Also, and all too frequently, the affected States violate their obligations under international law and undertake military offensives that obviate their priority role of protecting and safeguarding the human rights of all persons within their territory and jurisdiction. That has resulted in the fact that the majority of those killed in today's conflicts are civilians and that vulnerable groups such as women, children and people with disabilities become objects of aberrant war tactics such as starvation, trafficking and sexual violence. For example, at this very moment in Yemen, impediments to humanitarian access are putting more than 12 million people at risk of famine, mostly children. That must stop.

We emphasize that the absence of solutions and policies and the inability of the international community at all levels to effectively address the root causes of conflicts remain determining factors in the rise of insecurity, social instability and the proliferation of violence. All of that indicates that much remains to be done.

We wish to highlight the important progress made by the Security Council in adopting protection mandates for peacekeeping missions that are adapted to the civilian populations they serve. We also believe that the Council has managed to make progress towards

a better coordination of the United Nations protection system, and we stress that the protection of civilians concerns not only the humanitarian sphere but also the areas of peacekeeping and human rights, the rule of law, security, disarmament and development. We also recognize that the protection of civilians also requires the reduction of the prevalence and risk of war. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of high-quality education and the role of young people in the construction of a culture of peace, tolerance and social cohesion.

We cannot fail to recognize as a significant step the Council's establishment of monitoring mechanisms in compliance with the protection mandates of peacekeeping missions. That step is both a recognition of the need for mandates to be adapted to the often-changing reality on the ground and a means of strengthening the preventive approach by which many lives can be saved.

The particular needs of women and girls in armed conflict must remain systematically at the centre of humanitarian action and of the decisions and mandates of the Security Council. That is why the deployment in missions of advisers for the protection of women and children is fundamental, as are the monitoring and reporting mechanisms I mentioned.

People with disabilities are among the least accessible and most needy members of a community, with restricted mobility and communication and informational barriers. Ensuring the adequate protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflicts requires a well-integrated and implemented policy approach that produces solutions based on the realities on the ground. We also believe it is vital to collect population data on disabilities and other information that can better inform humanitarian responses and protection activities.

Young people in conflict are exposed to numerous risks and violence in many forms, especially considering that there is no legal mechanism or framework that ensures the rights and specific needs of young people. The Security Council could fill that gap. Young people tend to be the first targets of armed or extremist groups as well as being victims of social exclusion and injustice. Protecting their lives and human rights must therefore be a priority, and that includes the lives and human rights of young peacemakers, human rights defenders and members of youth organizations, who are liable to face reprisals for their work. We therefore

hope that all of the Secretary-General's reports on the protection of civilians and on specific countries will include provisions relating to the situation of young people on the ground.

In the face of a global humanitarian context of growing and varied needs, many humanitarian actors must provide assistance in conditions of extreme insecurity, which limits their access to the affected populations. Many have lost their lives in the service of the most vulnerable. We therefore reiterate that it is essential to guarantee their protection, security and free movement as they carry out their functions. We specifically want to highlight the importance of taking every possible measure to protect medical personnel and infrastructure in armed conflict and ensure that those who carry out indiscriminate attacks on them are duly brought to justice. In that context, we underscore that the scourge of impunity and lack of accountability significantly undermines the protection-of-civilians agenda. We must be firm in ensuring that the perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law, and human rights and refugee law, are prosecuted and pay for their acts.

In conclusion, the Dominican Republic believes that any action aimed at protecting civilian populations in armed conflict should be undertaken in full respect of human dignity and on a basis of impartiality, inclusion and the specific needs of the populations they serve, and thereby contribute to the welfare of the most vulnerable in order to facilitate their recovery and give them a better future.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): The headlines remind us of the urgency of the protection of civilians. Recently in Idlib in Syria, more than 160 people have been killed and 180,000 displaced, including 80,000 children, while 83,000 people are trapped in a confined area with no shelter but trees.

Twenty years of the protection of civilians in the Council has brought significant progress on this issue, and yet thousands of civilians on the ground are still dying as a result of wars that too often are in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373), in 2018 there were 28,000 victims in only six theatres on the Council's agenda.

We therefore thank you, Madam President, for your commitment to improving the effectiveness of protection on the ground, in the framework of the

Council presidency. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Mauer and Mr. Federico Borello for their contribution. Today we must move from principles to action. As Mr. Borello said, to do that we must define concrete ways in which the Council can be united in its work.

Belgium aligns itself with the statements to be made by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians. For my part I would like to discuss three concrete approaches — first, what peace operations can learn from the other actors' practices on the ground; secondly, the importance of concrete data for protection and thirdly, the responsibility of each State to ensure that the most serious crimes do not go unpunished.

First, owing to the complexity of current conflicts, peace operations constantly face new challenges in their efforts to protect civilians. We must find better ways to overcome them. For example, could peace operations collaborate more effectively with civil-society organizations and learn from their experiences in community engagement? In that context, it is a positive that the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan recognizes the importance of exploring techniques for the non-armed protection of civilians, including through community engagement. That could serve as an inspiration for other mandates. We should not forget that a lasting peace is built not between States but between peoples and communities.

As the Secretary-General emphasizes, children require special protection measures. Failure to assume our responsibility to better protect children not only harms girls and boys living in insecurity, it also exacerbates the grievances between warring parties and diminishes their ability to resolve their conflicts peacefully. Peace operations have a key role to play in deploying child protection advisers, integrating child protection into missions and negotiating action plans with armed groups.

Secondly, the Council must be better informed about cases of serious violations of international law and should make better use of the instruments available to it for documenting and investigating such violations. As the Secretary-General indicated in his report, civilian casualty tracking deserves more attention, as it is critical to supporting evidence-based advocacy, identifying the factors behind attacks that result in

civilian casualties and preventing the recurrence of violations. In the interests of improving prevention, Belgium also supports the integration of the *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes*, published by the United Nations in 2014, into predeployment training for peace operations, in order to enhance troops' early-warning and atrocity-risk-assessment capacities.

Finally, we note that respect for international law is first and foremost the responsibility of each State. With regard to the most serious crimes, that means the obligation to prosecute their perpetrators so that they cannot escape justice wherever they are.

That is why we call on States to join the initiative to develop a multilateral treaty on mutual legal assistance and extradition for prosecuting perpetrators of the most serious crimes in national courts. However, if progress at the national level is too slow or even non-existent, the Security Council must play its part and be more proactive in holding perpetrators to account, including by referring situations where the most serious crimes may have been committed to the International Criminal Court.

The Council also has a responsibility to respond to the serious threat posed to civilians by explosive devices, that is, landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. In the next few months Belgium will start working on concrete initiatives in this area.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Madam President, we are once again pleased to see you presiding over the Security Council, and we are grateful to our Indonesian colleagues for proposing that we address the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. My thanks also go to the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict, for their contributions to today's discussion.

Over the past 20 years, the subject of the protection of civilians has occupied a special place in the work of the Security Council. The Council has adopted a number of important resolutions that define the work of the United Nations and set universal standards in this area. Without question, the work of the Security Council over these years has helped to strengthen the protection of civilians, thereby saving lives. Nevertheless, the number of victims in armed conflict, a significant

proportion of whom are women and children, is unacceptably high. The change in the character of armed confrontations has brought new challenges with it, and the answers to those challenges must be sought through continued dialogue and by uniting efforts to prevent conflicts and settle them peacefully. Only this type of approach, founded on international law in its classic sense, without invented artificial concepts, can produce positive results.

Today we are seeing a particular threat from terrorist groups involved in armed conflict. For these groups, mass executions, the use of civilian facilities as cover and civilians as human shields, and the creation of obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance are the norm. The sobering statistics for civilian victims of terrorism confirm the importance of ramping up efforts to mobilize States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to strengthen mechanisms for combating the global terrorist threat. There is no question that terrorist activity should be put down, but it should be with intelligent and proportional force. We are concerned about the spreading practice of using combat drones, for example. The difficulty of controlling such devices can lead to civilian casualties, which we are seeing in the situation in Afghanistan in particular. We are also concerned about the psychological stress that civilians are exposed to when living under the constant threat of destructive missile strikes as well as about civilian deaths.

The humanitarian component is an important factor in the protection of civilians. The work of humanitarian actors should be based on the Charter of the United Nations and fundamental humanitarian principles. We firmly reject the use of humanitarian pretexts for criminal purposes, or to support terrorists or spread disinformation. The activities of the notorious White Helmets in Syria — and this is mainly about that organization — have not only done severe damage to the Syrian peace process, they have also significantly compromised the international humanitarian movement. The unprecedented politicization of the humanitarian arena in international relations that we are seeing today certainly does nothing to help us achieve the noble goal of preventing and minimizing the suffering of civilians. It is crucial to always ensure that aid to people in need, rather than political aims, is at the core of humanitarian efforts. That also applies to assessments of humanitarian needs, which should be carried out in close coordination with the authorities of

host countries, in accordance with fundamental General Assembly resolutions. Unfortunately, the Office within the Secretariat responsible for those assessments does not always succeed in complying with that rule. We urge it to pay greater attention to the issue in future.

Lastly, within specialized international organizations, civil society and academic circles, we have recently seen a kind of sports competition emerge based on who can think up the most interesting novelty for discussion within the framework of the subject of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Security Council has also been infected, unfortunately. There is no need to develop new international legal concepts that allegedly fill so-called gaps in the protection regime in the Geneva Conventions. We should not be distracted by the endless identification of new categories of persons who need special protection under international law. In practice, such ideas can only weaken the protection we give civilians. The Council's job should be to concentrate on practical work for ensuring the protection of civilians within the framework of existing international legal standards and prevailing mandates.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to begin by thanking you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting. I would also like to express Poland's appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Maurer and Mr. Borello for their comprehensive briefings, which demonstrated how relevant today's open debate is and show that violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law continue to have an enormous negative impact on people's everyday lives. From this perspective, we particularly welcome the community-level-based approach highlighted in the concept note circulated by the Indonesian presidency (S/2019/385, annex).

Poland welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373), particularly its well-founded and accurate recommendations, which come as we are celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and marking the twentieth anniversary of the first-ever Security Council presidential statement on the protection of civilians (S/PRST/1999/6). Since then the Security Council has made huge progress in strengthening the protection-of-civilians framework, yet the reality on the ground remains as worrisome as ever, which makes it imperative for the international community and the Security Council to step up their efforts in the field.

Almost a year ago, when Poland held the presidency of the Security Council in May 2018, and convened a similar open debate (see S/PV.8264), Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs said that we should focus on three main areas to ensure effective protection in conflict situations — prevention, protection and accountability. Those words remain valid today. Prevention is the only way to end the pain and suffering afflicting the millions of women, children and men all over the world who have been victims of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks by parties to conflicts, including those who are particularly vulnerable in such situations — women, children, persons with disabilities, detainees and missing persons. To that end, it is crucial for the parties to conflicts to develop and promote good practices that can prevent and mitigate harm to civilians. Risk assessment, dialogue and inclusive processes that put people at risk of a lack of protection at the centre of any response are essential. That is also true because local communities possess the best knowledge about the threats to which they might be exposed. To secure better protection, on the other hand, respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be enhanced. It is important that all States and non-State parties to a conflict comply with their legal obligations.

An ongoing analysis of the humanitarian domain allows us to identify the most worrisome humanitarian challenges to the protection of civilians around the world, among which are the progressive urbanization of conflicts; the human impact of improvised explosive devices; unlawful denial of humanitarian access; attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel, hospitals and other facilities; the destruction of civilian infrastructure; counter-terrorism measures that impede humanitarian action; and sexual and gender-based violence. Attacks on journalists are yet another example of a flagrant violation of the existing normative framework.

Finally, the widespread impact of armed conflict on the situation of persons with disabilities raises the highest-level of concern and should be addressed and mitigated in an effective manner. To that end, I am pleased to announce that Poland has decided to join the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. We encourage others to do the same. Furthermore, Poland, together with the United Kingdom, has proposed a draft resolution on persons with disabilities. We believe that document will significantly contribute to protection of that group and

ensure that persons with disabilities are recognized as agents of change in peace processes.

As the Secretary-General's report states, 22,800 civilians were reported dead or injured in six countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. The figures are underestimated, and civilians are suffering all over the world.

As far as European countries are concerned, Ukraine has been witnessing continued military aggression and the unlawful occupation of its territories by the Russian Federation. Despite many efforts undertaken by the international community, a ceasefire in Ukraine is far from being achieved. Civilians continue to be killed and injured by explosive remnants of war and landmines. The number of internally displaced persons has stabilized, reaching a peak of 1.5 million people. The conflict continues to have a negative impact in other domains, including the environment, which results in further negative consequences for human health, as it inflicts serious health problems and reduces access to resources that are vital for survival.

As that example shows, the protection of civilians is not an exclusively humanitarian task, but requires a comprehensive approach with adequate actions to be taken in peacekeeping, human rights, the rule of law and the political, security, development and disarmament spheres. As the challenge is global, we should promote cooperation and partnership among States and international and non-governmental organizations, as well as other stakeholders. Those actions should be supported by heightened diplomacy, awareness-raising and the necessary training.

At the same time, activities carried out at the level of the communities that are affected by armed conflict cannot be considered a substitute for the protection responsibilities of authorities. As Member States, we must do our utmost to end impunity for any violation of international humanitarian law. It is necessary to ensure accountability, no matter who the perpetrator of a given crime or abuse is. The International Criminal Court should play the leading role in holding parties to a conflict accountable and restoring a sense of justice on the international stage. That would clearly improve the protection of civilians and allow for visible progress to be made.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to welcome you, Madam Foreign Minister, to New York to preside over this open debate.

I thank Secretary-General Guterres and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Mauer, for their briefings. I also listened attentively to the briefing delivered by Mr. Borello.

This year coincides with the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians in time of war, as well as the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which put the protection of civilians in armed conflict on the Council's agenda. As one of the core items on the Council's agenda, the protection of civilians in armed conflict has been accorded great attention by the international community, and the Council has made positive progress in promoting the development of mechanisms and in ensuring progress on its implementation to a certain extent. Meanwhile, civilians still bear the brunt as victims of war and armed conflicts, accounting for the vast majority of casualties in conflicts.

The international security situation remains grave. Armed conflicts persist in some regions, causing heavy civilian casualties. Pragmatic and effective measures should be taken to ensure the safety and security of civilians in conflict. With that in mind, China offers the following four proposals.

First, we should tackle both symptoms and root causes, bolster prevention and address the protection of civilians at its origin. Preventing, reducing and resolving conflicts and settling disputes in a peaceful manner are the most effective means to achieve the protection of civilians.

As the core of the collective security mechanism, the Security Council should earnestly fulfil its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and resolving conflicts by promoting dialogue, consultation and political negotiations, so that civilians can be safe from the suffering caused by war. We must oppose the use of force or the threat of force at every turn and reject power politics and bullying.

The international community should establish a concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security; build partnerships based on dialogue, friendship, non-confrontation and non-alignment; and create a world of lasting peace and universal security. We should be aware of our shared future for humankind; advocate for the global governance concept of neutral consultation, joint

contribution and sharing; and strive to create a peaceful and stable international environment.

Secondly, under international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, national Governments and parties to the conflict in question must assume their responsibility for the protection of civilians. Without a doubt, all national Governments have the primary responsibility of protecting their own civilians, a role that is irreplaceable. The international community should provide constructive assistance in that regard, but must respect the sovereignty of the country concerned.

The actions of the parties to a conflict are regulated by international law and Security Council resolutions. In situations where conflicts are unavoidable, the best possible efforts must be made to avoid injuring innocent civilians; prevent the abuse of force and actions taken in disregard of humanitarian consequences; and avoid the asymmetrical use of force and the use of high explosive weapons in densely populated areas. Gaining military advantages by attacking civilians must be strictly forbidden. Violations of international humanitarian law in armed conflict, such as threats or attacks against civilians, should be investigated and punished in accordance with law.

Thirdly, United Nations peacekeeping operations should effectively fulfil their responsibilities of protecting civilians in strict accordance with the mandates conferred upon them by the Council. The Council should consider in an integrated manner host countries' situations and needs in relation to peacekeeping missions' capacities and conditions, in order to establish clear, realistic and viable mandates. All missions should develop clear plans based on a limited number of conditions, strengthen their internal coordination and ensure that they implement their mandate effectively. We should bolster international cooperation against terrorism and crack down resolutely on terrorist acts that endanger civilians' safety and security.

Humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by armed conflict should be increased. Humanitarian organizations should promote a spirit of humanity, fraternity and dedication, uphold the fundamental principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, enhance their humanitarian nature and professionalism and avoid getting embroiled in conflicts. We should strengthen the protection of humanitarian workers,

health workers and facilities, as well as specific vulnerable groups such as women, children, refugees and displaced persons.

Fourthly, all United Nations agencies and the various humanitarian organizations should demonstrate their expertise and strengths and fully leverage the unique role of regional and subregional organizations such as the African Union and the League of Arab States. They should improve communication with regard to information on policies and help host countries strengthen their capacity to protect civilians. Non-governmental organizations must respect the Governments of host countries, consult the countries concerned fully and play a constructive role. The United Nations must maintain communication with all the parties to a conflict, increase its guidance on humanitarian relief operations and provide comprehensive and dedicated protection for the civilians affected.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to thank you, Madam President, as well as today's briefers, and we are grateful to the Indonesian presidency for organizing today's debate on the protection of civilians. We also welcome the Ministers with us in the Council today.

As we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's addition of the protection of civilians in armed conflict to its agenda, we continue to see conflict and violence endangering civilians. The Secretary-General's 2019 report on the protection of civilians (S/2019/373) paints a dire picture. The United States strongly believes that the full implementation of international humanitarian law by all parties to a conflict is essential to the protection of civilians, but we also know that the laws of war are not always universally observed, and that often has grave consequences. We agree that Member States can and should do more to protect civilians. And while it is critical to acknowledge and focus on war's tragic impact on civilians, it is also vital to recognize when harm has been successfully avoided and understand how that is achieved. Many countries, including the United States, have rigorous programmes in their armed forces for implementing protections for civilians under international humanitarian law. Recommendations that we identified during a study of civilian casualties in 2018 are being used to improve existing policies and practices. The United States has been sharing and building on good practices, including bilaterally and

during coalition operations. We encourage others to do the same.

Globally, mass displacement and attacks on civilians have become all too common, and attacks on the very medical and humanitarian personnel working tirelessly to alleviate suffering and save lives are a hallmark of many conflicts. In Syria, civilians have suffered during the eight-year conflict at the hands of a Government that blatantly disregards their lives, including through the horrific use of chemical weapons and indiscriminate weapons such as barrel bombs in urban settings. And I must point out that the White Helmets, contrary to Russia's repeated attempts at vilification, continue to heroically assist Syrian civilians attacked by their own Government, attacks that we know Russia chooses to ignore.

In Burma, more than 1.1 million civilians have been driven from their homes by the military and security services. Nearly 1 million languish in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Ongoing fighting in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin states continues to harm and displace people, many of whom desperately need humanitarian assistance. In South Sudan, the lack of safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access means that people starve and children suffer needlessly. More than 200,000 South Sudanese have fled to protection-of-civilian sites knowing that they were not safe at home. Their fears have been borne out in the blatant use of sexual and gender-based violence against women going about their daily lives. We must hold the perpetrators accountable and ensure justice for the victims.

It is critically important that humanitarian actors have unhindered access to populations in need, and they should be commended for their work to protect civilians in the most challenging of circumstances. We support the centrality of protection and continue to support humanitarian organizations in strengthening their protection efforts, particularly to expand community-based protection that draws on the capacities of local populations and partners.

Peacekeeping has become central to the protection of civilians in conflict. With more than 95 per cent of United Nations peacekeepers now operating under mandates to protect civilians, the protection of civilians is at the heart of modern peacekeeping. Unfortunately, we still see far too many instances of peacekeepers failing to take necessary action to protect civilians. To address these shortcomings, we support the Secretary-

General's efforts to institutionalize a culture of performance in which only the highest-performing troops and police are deployed. We look forward to the continued implementation of the Secretary-General's performance policy framework and his commitment to creating a system that ensures accountability. The United States stands firmly behind the commitment to enhancing performance in the protection of civilians and encourages all Member States to do the same by supporting the Kigali Principles, which were designed to help peacekeepers effectively implement their civilian-protection mandates. We also welcome the forthcoming publication of the revised United Nations policy on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping, especially the integration of the addendum on accountability. Significantly improving the protection of civilians in peacekeeping requires identifying standards, systematically evaluating records and ensuring accountability for performance.

We also know that increasing women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peacekeeping improves operational effectiveness and a mission's ability to fulfil protection-of-civilian mandates. We support efforts to reduce barriers to women's participation and promote their safety in peace operations.

It is not enough to be outraged by the accounts we hear of the horrors inflicted on civilians trapped in conflicts that they did not create. We must commit to protecting civilians by turning rhetoric into tangible action. The international community should consistently bring attention to the protection of civilians and develop responses for it.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to warmly thank the Indonesian presidency for organizing this vital debate on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians on the Security Council's agenda and to welcome the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, who is presiding over our work. The contributions of your country and troops to peacekeeping and to the United Nations efforts to protect civilians are invaluable, Madam President. This debate is an excellent opportunity for all of us to take stock of the Security Council's action and the progress that is still to be made in this area. The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373) and his ambitious recommendations should serve as our guide in that endeavour. I would also like to welcome the other Ministers present at this meeting and to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter

Mauer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict, for their informative briefings.

Let us be clear about the facts. Conflicts last longer and are becoming more complex, and their impact on civilians is as severe as it was during the era of major global conflicts. In Syria, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Yemen, Burma, Afghanistan and Iraq, violence against civilians is being perpetrated on a massive scale. To counter that trend, the Security Council has adopted specific measures to protect civilians over the past 20 years. I would like to underscore two basic points, much of which my colleagues have already discussed, and discussed well.

First, it is the mandates given to peacekeeping operations that have the goal of protecting civilians at their core. Thanks to the Secretary-General's efforts, the protection of civilians is implemented by all of the missions' components, military, police and civilian, including their human rights divisions. Those components are working in an increasingly integrated way. With casualty tracking, the performance measurement of peacekeeping operations takes the protection of civilians fully into account. We should build on that achievement by providing operations with the means to act with robust mandates and adequate resources.

My second point concerns the human rights due diligence policy, which is aimed at ensuring that peacekeeping actors are exemplars and encourages the acceptance of United Nations forces by local populations. That policy has taken on a new form in the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). In a very innovative fashion, the Security Council has made the protection of civilians an integral part of the operationalization of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. We welcome the technical assistance provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights enabling the G-5 Sahel countries to fulfil their obligations, and the financial support of the European Union. The necessary resources will have to be mobilized over time to support that kind of protection framework. The United Nations has an increasingly important role to play in that regard where regional peace operations are concerned. Accordingly, and without presuming to be exhaustive, France

believes that the Council must redouble its efforts in at least five areas.

The first priority is ensuring compliance with the relevant international conventions, foremost of which are the Geneva Conventions, whose seventieth anniversary we are celebrating. I am including human rights conventions under the same rubric, in particular the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the various treaties on arms control. In that regard, France remains fully committed to the universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty, which has become a major pillar in the protection of civilians. France urges major arms exporters and importers to take a responsible approach to supporting the Treaty, which is key to curbing such weapons' uncontrolled spread and their deadly consequences for civilians.

The second priority is protecting humanitarian and medical personnel and infrastructure. Just since the beginning of this year, the Office of Mission Support has reported more than 300 attacks on medical infrastructure or personnel. In Syria, along with the most recent strike on a health-care centre in Kafr Nabl this past Sunday, a total of 19 hospitals were targeted by a single offensive by the regime and its supporters in Idlib. That is clearly unacceptable. In that regard, let me recall what Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, said at an Arria Formula meeting on 1 April, in the context of the French and German joint presidencies of the Security Council,

“Our responsibility is to find the operational means to ensure the protection of the men and women who embody the spirit of the 1949 Geneva Conventions on a daily basis.”

At the national level, France is committed to ensuring that the protection of humanitarian and health personnel is integrated into military operations, starting at the planning stage. The use of force can be authorized to protect them from hostile acts. With regard to humanitarian aid workers, our armed forces list health-care facilities in theatres of operation in order to protect them against targeted operations.

Learning the rules of the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel is also a key part of our training programmes, including in Africa, based on the training currently conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross at the Libreville Staff School. In Mali, the legal advisers of Operation Barkhane have conducted

awareness-raising exercises for the Malian forces as part of regular training in the area of the law of armed conflict for several years. In accordance with resolution 2462 (2019), on countering the financing of terrorist acts, which was adopted during the French presidency of the Council, we are exercising great care to ensure that the measures implemented to combat terrorism do not adversely affect the activities of humanitarian personnel. In that regard, we will continue to be especially careful to ensure that such personnel are not unduly prosecuted for activities carried out in strict compliance with the principles of humanitarian law.

The third priority is to make the protection of children and women on the ground more effective. Much remains to be done in that major area. It calls for the deployment of child protection and women's protection advisers within peace operations. It also requires the universal endorsement of the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, also known as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

The fourth priority that should guide us is ensuring the effective protection of journalists in situations of armed conflict, in accordance with resolutions 1738 (2006) and 2222 (2015). In its multipronged efforts in that regard, France sensitizes French and foreign journalists to high-risk situations.

The fifth priority concerns the fight against impunity and the necessary prosecution of violations. First of all, civilians will be protected only if those who target them are punished. The Council must make more systematic use of individual sanctions against those responsible for violations of humanitarian law and human rights law, sexual violence and serious violations against children. Secondly, justice must be done for the victims. In that regard, we must strengthen national capacities, ensure systematic, impartial and independent investigations, and in cases where national mechanisms are insufficient or inadequate, resolutely support the use of international mechanisms. They must be provided with the necessary resources, be able to rely on the full cooperation of States and include the involvement of local communities.

On the twentieth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians in armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council, clarity and determination are

therefore more important than ever. That is why Mr. Le Drian and his German counterpart Heiko Maas decided on 1 April (see S/PV.8499) to launch the international initiative Humanitarian Call for Action, so that the Council's resolutions can be transformed into concrete actions on the ground. As the German Minister said earlier, France and Germany hope that the Humanitarian Call for Action will lead to the adoption of a declaration of commitment by States on the margins of the next session of the General Assembly to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. We owe it to the civilian populations whom it is our duty to protect.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Indonesian presidency for convening this open debate on the subject of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which is also a priority for our country. We especially welcome your presence, Madam President, as well as that of other high-level participants. We are also grateful for the important briefings by the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict.

We would like to recall that we are marking the seventieth anniversary of the adoption the Geneva Conventions, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, relative to the protection of civilians.

Peru is a country committed to international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We are party to the major international instruments in both areas, and our national legislation has accordingly incorporated, developed and implemented them within our domestic legislation. We consider the Security Council's responsibility to protect civilians under international humanitarian law a high priority. The Council has a moral and legal obligation to act in concert to end the suffering of millions of people in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Libya and Palestine, among others.

In that connection, we emphasize that 119 States, including Peru and nine other members of the Council, have subscribed to the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group on mass atrocity crimes, which commits us to acting in a timely and decisive manner to prevent and end atrocity crimes. We believe that the principle of the sovereignty of every State implies their primary responsibility to protect their peoples, and that in accordance with the

Charter of the United Nations, when national authorities fail to protect their populations the international community must assume that responsibility under international law.

In that regard, Peru adheres to the concept of responsibility to protect. We also highlight that several peacekeeping operations deployed through a Council resolution have mandates to protect civilians, including against acts by the regular army of their own Government.

The latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373) emphasizes the urgent need to address the harmful impact caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which have not only claimed millions of lives but also caused damage to infrastructure and essential services, giving rise to forced displacement and the economic exclusion of victims. That means improving compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law in order to ensure the protection of civilians, including in attacks on schools and medical facilities during armed conflicts. In addition, due care and rehabilitation of victims are fundamental to any sustainable peacebuilding process, in particular given the psychological impacts of conflicts on civilians, especially the most vulnerable.

We believe in the importance of taking into account the needs and concerns of affected communities in order to improve their protection. We would like to highlight the role that young people and women are called upon to play in conflict prevention and resolution, justice and reconciliation. Ensuring accountability for atrocity crimes is equally critical. We therefore support the work of international investigative mechanisms to address atrocity crimes, such as that established in the case of Da'esh. We also believe that the universalization of international criminal jurisdiction will make it possible to prevent the suffering of civilians in conflicts more effectively.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the humanitarian agencies and workers, as well as the Blue Helmets, involved in protecting civilians in conflict areas under the most difficult conditions, risking their lives to save others.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin, Madam President, by thanking your Excellency and the Government of friendly Indonesia for convening this important debate. I would also like

to express our gratitude to His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, Mr. Peter Mauer and Mr. Federico Borello for their valuable briefings and for their participation in today's meeting.

I align myself with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

The year 2019 marks the seventieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1265 (1999) as well as the inclusion of the protection of civilians as a standing item on the Council's agenda. However, the challenges facing the protection of civilians are the same as they were 20 years ago. The cycle of violence will continue to harm millions of innocent civilians in conflict areas for another 20 years if we do not adopt serious and urgent measures that reflect the repeated calls and appeals to Member States, United Nations officials and international community to address this phenomenon. We agree with the Secretary-General when he expressed his deep concern about this issue in his report on protecting civilians in armed conflict for this year (S/2019/373).

I would like to focus in my statement on three main issues: ensuring respect for international humanitarian law and guaranteeing access to humanitarian assistance, accountability and how to better implement the protection of civilians.

First, the atrocities committed against innocent civilians everywhere in the world are caused by disregarding and deliberately violating international humanitarian law. There are still parties to many conflicts that completely ignore their obligations under international humanitarian law. They deal with international law as if it is just ink on paper. We all see attacks against medical facilities, schools and humanitarian workers. We also see the prevention of access to humanitarian assistance and the use of starvation and sexual violence as a method of warfare. Therefore, we emphasize that all parties to an agreement must comply with the obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. They must also implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that regard, we reiterate our call to refrain from using the veto when the issue concerns delivering humanitarian assistance to besieged and needy civilians during conflict.

Secondly, another factor that perpetuates the endless cycle of violence against civilians in conflict is the phenomenon of impunity. Some parties to armed conflicts continue to commit crimes against civilians and violate international laws without being deterred or subjected to accountability. In that regard, Kuwait supports the use of Security Council tools to guarantee accountability of the perpetrators of crimes committed in armed conflicts and bring them to justice, including through Council sanctions committees and fact-finding missions.

Thirdly, it is important to know that the report of the Secretary-General clearly outlines all the necessary steps and measures that must be taken to improve the implementation of the mandate related to the protection of civilians and put an end to the crimes committed against them. That would be done by ensuring urgent and concrete progress in implementing the three recommendations that he mentioned in his previous report (S/2019/462), namely, developing national policy frameworks for protection of civilians, enhancing compliance and respect of the law by non-State armed groups, and promoting compliance with international law through accountability. We share Indonesia's view regarding the importance of focusing on the involvement of societies and promoting their role in the protection of civilians.

Lastly, concerning the topic of protecting civilians in armed conflict, the State of Kuwait has sought to strengthen the institutional and normative framework for protecting civilians based on our bitter national experience from which many of our people are still suffering. Consequently, we have proposed a draft resolution on the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. We thank Mr. Peter Mauer, who highlighted in his statement today the continued humanitarian suffering and its negative effects. The Security Council does not have a reference language pertaining to the issue of missing persons, which, if addressed according to clear measures at the beginning of a conflict, would have a significant impact on the post-conflict agreement and reconciliation phase as well as on restoring relations among the parties and building confidence. The draft resolution also aims to reiterate the importance of the relevant rules of international humanitarian law and human rights law on missing persons in armed conflicts. During its presidency of the Council next month the State of Kuwait will organize

a meeting to brief members on this topic. We hope that our draft resolution will be adopted during the meeting.

Even after 20 years have elapsed since the Security Council adopted the mandate of protecting civilians, this issue remains more important than ever. We, as Council members, must intensify our efforts to ensure that innocent civilians do not pay a price for the conflicts of which they have unwillingly become a part. We must shoulder our responsibility and commit ourselves to seriously working to guarantee peace and reach lasting political solutions to conflicts, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. The peoples of the world deserve more than mere words and continuing condemnations.

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. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a very large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Mr. Meleşcanu (Romania): I thank Indonesia for organizing today's debate on a topic that is extremely relevant for us.

Romania aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Our discussion is taking place at a very opportune time and represents the tribute we can pay on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999)—the first Security Council resolution addressing the protection of civilians during armed conflict. By adopting that resolution, the Security Council recognized that civilians account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts and are increasingly targeted by combatants and armed elements. This year also marks the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions — a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. Their adoption in the aftermath of the Second World War firmly established that those who are no longer taking part in hostilities — the wounded, sick, prisoners of war and civilians, including those living under occupation — must be protected and their life and dignity upheld without adverse distinction. We

thank the Secretary-General for submitting today's report (S/2019/373) with all of our achievements and the challenges we face. Allow me to share with the Council some aspects of my country's contribution to the efforts of the United Nations system to protect civilians.

As a contributor to peacekeeping operations for more than 28 years, Romania always organizes prior to the deployment of the contingent under the United Nations flag a rigorous three-month training programme, in which the protection of civilians and respect for human rights are cornerstone subjects. Romania is currently engaged with the majority of individual police officers and military personnel in peacekeeping missions with a protection-of-civilians mandate. I am referring to Haiti, Mali, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. We appreciate the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative, which was launched in September 2018. The Declaration of Shared Commitments on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations has been endorsed by more than 150 States Members of the United Nations, including Romania, which is a clear reflection of the importance we attach to it.

Romania also endorsed, on 1 April, the political declaration of the protection of medical personnel in armed conflict, initiated by France in 2017. When we address the various aspects of the issue of civilians in armed conflict, we are also referring to the risks and problems faced by children. We endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

For our point of view, women also require special protection measures. One of the most important measures is to deploy as many women as possible in peacekeeping missions. I am proud to tell the Council that in our contingent of military observers and staff officers, 17 per cent are women. We strongly support the Secretary-General's proposal about developing national policy frameworks for the protection of civilians.

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate that my country is committed to contributing effectively to the implementation of the decisions and mandates established by the Council, to which we are a candidate for this year's elections.

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

Mr. Ouch (Cambodia): I would like to commend Indonesia's initiative to convene today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which is a timely agenda at the current critical juncture of international security. I also wish to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his informative briefing.

Cambodia listened carefully to the passionate plea for international law and humanitarian action by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict. There is no doubt that the present situation concerning international security remains grim. With the evolving nature of armed conflicts, civilians across the various regions of the world continue to suffer heavy casualties. However, the protection of civilians remains an arduous task for the international community.

Over the past 20 years, the Security Council adopted multiple resolutions and presidential statements and developed a legal framework for strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In addition, the protection of civilians has become one of the key mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Cambodia's contributions to international security and peacekeeping are well documented. From being a recipient State of peacekeeping forces in the early 1990s, Cambodia has since 2006 been an active State in deploying staff to United Nations peacekeeping missions, having sent nearly 6,000 troops to eight countries in Africa and the Middle East. With regard to sending female officers to United Nations missions, in 2017 the United Nations ranked Cambodia first among the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and second in Asia overall. Based on our practical experience, I would like to contribute five points to today's deliberations.

First, peacekeeping operations must work strictly within the parameters of the Security Council's mandate in fulfilling their responsibility to protect civilians. However, it cannot be a substitute for the responsibilities and obligations of the Government of the country concerned and of the parties to the conflict. In addition, lines of communication and a bond of sincere friendship among the peacekeepers, local authorities and the people must be further enhanced on the basis of winning their confidence and support. This

week, United Nations News published an article entitled *Cambodia: Giving Back to the UN Peacekeeping*, which features Cambodian peacekeepers inspecting a water purification plant. It is not the responsibility of the Cambodian contingent to process water for United Nations colleagues, but it is an indication of a cooperative and collegial approach to peacekeeping, which is born of a recent historical link.

Secondly, it is crucial that regular and close collaboration between local authorities and multilateral forces be established, with a view to gathering timely information prior to the eruption of conflict and to carrying out a safe and early evacuation of civilians from regions with armed conflict. Further efforts must be made with regard to the timely provision of protection and medical care to refugees during armed conflict. In certain dangerous situations, our troops have participated in jointly coordinated responses through regular patrols and control of the movement of internally displaced persons and of refugee camps to protect civilians from armed attacks. Moreover, the entry-exit point of refugee camps must be tightly controlled in order to prevent the importation of weapons and other prospective harmful substances that could potentially endanger the safety and security of civilians living in the affected areas.

Thirdly, education is an essential factor. Local authorities and multilateral forces need to work hand in hand to disseminate the relevant laws and culture of the country of operation and pertinent international law in vulnerable areas, as well as information on the role and responsibilities of the United Nations in areas of operation. In addition, the awareness of the local authorities and people must be raised with regard to the risks, incidents and impact of landmines and unexploded ordinance. It is also imperative to strengthen professional skills prior to the deployment, based on the new United Nations reform as well as engagement in the protection of civilians and the fight against violence and sexual trafficking. At the request of the United Nations, Cambodia is now in the process of reviewing amendments to the legal framework on the policy on accountability for conduct and discipline in field missions.

Fourthly, the lessons learned have taught us that predeployment and in-mission training for our troops have proven to be an effective and contributing factor of successful peacekeeping operations. The troops should be provided with reliable field support,

adequate equipment and modern technologies. In that connection, my Government made its modest contribution last March by providing armoured vehicles to our Cambodian United Nations peacekeeping forces in Mali.

Fifthly, as protection-of-civilians mandates are fully integrated into each peacekeeping operation, troop- and police-contributing countries must be consulted in the formulation of mission-specific objectives so as to ensure the greater effectiveness of United Nations forces, and in this way improve the protection of civilians.

Peacekeeping has faced unprecedented challenges since the non-State actors have waged rebellion wars against our peacekeeping forces, which have claimed many lives and caused disabilities. We are sincerely indebted to the sacrifice of these United Nations heroes.

Before I conclude, I would like to reaffirm that regardless of the hurdles, Cambodia remains committed to further contributing to the cause of this great mission.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Mr. Blok (Netherlands): It should be self-evident that a Government's first duty is to protect its citizens. And the first duty for the Governments united in the Council is to protect civilians under threat from war, violence and suffering. After all, if we are not here to protect people, what are we doing?

I would like to thank Indonesia for putting this important theme at the centre of today's discussion, and you, Madam President, for inviting me here. I am also grateful for the informative briefings provided by Mr. Maurer, Mr. Borello and the Secretary-General, for whom improving peacekeeping operations is rightly a priority.

Twenty years ago, in this very Chamber, my country joined those voting in favour of resolution 1265 (1999). Then, as now, it was our conviction that, in conflict, civilians must be protected. The Council made a promise. It expressed

“its willingness to respond to situations of armed conflict where civilians are being targeted or humanitarian assistance to civilians is obstructed” (*resolution 1265 (1999), para. 10*).

Indeed, this shows that the Council is guided by civilians as its rationale for action.

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), a lot has happened. We have seen a paradigm shift in our thinking; a mission with civilian protection in its mandate is now the norm. The 18 Kigali Principles were established. They are aimed at improving the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As endorser, we join the Secretary-General in its call for more signatories.

Last year, with South Sudan and Yemen in mind, we added the issue of conflict and hunger to outlaw the use of starvation as a tool of war. Our aim is to root out the crime of starving civilians by banning it and punishing the perpetrators. The protection of women against sexual violence also became an important theme.

Yet, as we are gathered here to commemorate 20 years of our efforts to protect civilians, we have to be frank enough to ask ourselves inconvenient questions. Is there a real reason to celebrate? Translating lofty words and good intentions into day-to-day realities in highly complex conflict environments is not easy. If civilians expect to be protected by incoming missions, and they are not, this may lead to frustration and a loss of credibility. It undermines the legitimacy of peacekeeping missions, of the United Nations and the Council and, in the end, their ability to prevent human suffering. And that is the last thing we want.

Civilian protection is not some last-minute add-on to peacekeeping. It should be a core goal of each mandate. It has to be funded and part of the standard operating procedures of the force. We should support it also in our discussions in the Fifth Committee.

In 1999, the Council emphasized the responsibility of States to end impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocides, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law. That brings me to the following vital point — the importance of accountability. As I have said before in this Chamber, violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law should not go unchallenged. Humanitarian law is not optional. It is not a luxury. It is the bedrock of what defines our humanity. Upholding humanitarian law is crucial to our very credibility. Violations should be subject to independent investigations, mandated by the international community. And yes, perpetrators should be afraid, aware that they will be called to account. They should be lying awake at night in the knowledge that one day they will face justice.

Today, I want to focus on the sheer number and gravity of the horrible crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). We all know the facts and have seen the images. We should all work to ensure that the perpetrators of those heinous crimes are brought to justice and to enable the Security Council to state this fact clearly: ISIS committed genocide against the Yazidis.

After fact-finding, evidence gathering, investigation and attribution, prosecution is the final and most important link in the accountability chain. Without that final link, justice is not served. ISIS perpetrators of mass atrocity crimes should be prosecuted, preferably in the region, and if feasible, under the jurisdiction of an ad hoc or hybrid international criminal tribunal. I am fully aware of the complex obstacles on the road towards that goal, but we have to keep in mind that justice is a prerequisite of lasting peace and security. We must join forces and take it step by step.

The Netherlands will do all in its power to help bring us closer to and reach that goal. At the opening of the next session of the General Assembly in September, the Netherlands will initiate a ministerial meeting on the prosecution of ISIS fighters. Today, I invite Security Council members and others to join us on that road towards justice. We owe it to the victims.

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

Ms. Goldsmith-Jones (Canada): Twenty years ago, when the protection of civilians agenda was first introduced in the Security Council, Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, then Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs, said that the ultimate aim of the Council's work was to safeguard the security of the world's people, not just the States in which they live. That continues to be true today. Canada is proud to have played a pivotal role in establishing the protection of civilians agenda as a core tenet of the Council's work. It was a paradigm shift in how the Council saw international peace and security, and important progress has been made over those 20 years.

We commend the Council's efforts on children and armed conflict; women and peace and security; conflict prevention and accountability; and the mainstreaming of the protection of civilians agenda throughout peacekeeping mandates and training, as well as in the context of sanctions regimes. Those developments have saved lives and brought hope to people in their darkest

hours. However, I think we all know that significant gaps persist.

Civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflict, including in Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Lake Chad Basin countries. Unlawful attacks against civilians are a clear violation of international humanitarian law and an assault on the rules-based international order.

Canada is alarmed that, despite resolution 2286 (2016), violence directed against humanitarian personnel has increased, including the targeting of medical personnel and facilities, as well as schools. Recent weeks have seen a shocking number of attacks on hospitals and health facilities in Idlib, Syria. Canada condemns these attacks and calls on those responsible to ensure fundamental protection to civilians caught in that conflict.

Canada is outraged by the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a tactic of war. As we noted in the Council last month, we have to ensure that robust legal and institutional arrangements are in place to address sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict and that steps are taken to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. Canada is participating in that kind of activity.

In this Chamber and in the field, Canada has a proven track record of advancing the protection of civilians. During our presidency of the Group of Seven, we championed the implementation of international humanitarian law through partner organizations. We believe that the protection of all civilians requires gender-responsive approaches. This includes humanitarian action, which now responds to the increased insecurity and threats that women and girls and other groups — including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons — often face during armed conflict. Improved access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services remains a non-negotiable component of an effective response. This also includes the meaningful participation of women and girls in decision-making processes, including access for local women's organizations, which know best.

Canada is also advancing the protection of civilians agenda through our renewed approach to peacekeeping. Following the launch of the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the

Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, we are leading a multi-stakeholder process to help translate that political commitment into meaningful action. Continuing our long-standing support for mine action, Canada remains firmly committed to advancing the goals of the Ottawa Convention and to achieving a world free of landmines by 2025.

Canada urges the Council to advocate, unequivocally, for compliance with international humanitarian law and to condemn violations when they occur. We need to continue to pursue accountability measures. The Council must also advance the gendered dimensions of the protection of civilians agenda, not only sexual violence in conflict, but also the differential impacts of armed conflict on women and girls and other groups that face gender-based discrimination and violence. We must hear their voices; we must meet their needs.

(spoke in French)

As the lead of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, Canada urges the Council to ensure greater accountability for the perpetrators of gender-based violence and support efforts at the international level and in the field. As local communities are the first to be affected by conflict, the Council should encourage the establishment of local-level alert networks, conflict-resolution, mediation and reconciliation. Canada urges the Council to preserve humanitarian space in counter-terrorism contexts, in accordance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law.

The protection of civilians agenda must also be consistently applied to peacekeeping. This means adequate resourcing for peacekeeping missions, including for advisers for the protection of civilians, child protection, women's protection and gender. It also means promoting best practices in performance and accountability in the implementation of protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations.

The next 20 years will test the international community's commitment to the protection of civilians agenda. We thank Indonesia for convening today's debate and providing the protection of civilians agenda the attention it merits. The Council can count on Canada to continue to be a steadfast advocate for respect for international humanitarian law, with civilians at the centre of our protection efforts.

Mr. Kováčik (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to thank the Indonesian presidency for organizing this important debate. I would also like to extend our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his recent report (S/2019/373) covering the global state of the protection of civilians, and a big thank you also goes to the International Committee of the Red Cross and to the Center for Civilians in Conflict.

While fully aligning myself with the statement of the European Union to be delivered later this afternoon, I would like to offer a few additional reflections in national capacity.

As mentioned by many speakers before me, this year marks two important milestones: the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark resolution 1265 (1999), by which the Council added the protection of civilians as an item to its agenda. The former was motivated by the aftermath of the Second World War, while the latter was a reaction to the reports of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Africa and the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Civilians accounted for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts and were increasingly targeted by combatants and armed elements. Women, children and other vulnerable groups, including refugees and internally displaced persons, were especially targeted by acts of violence.

Today, 20 years later, we read in the report of the Secretary-General that “the state of the protection of civilians today is tragically similar to that of 20 years ago” (S/2019/393, *para.* 4). Civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts, and women, children and other vulnerable groups remain targets.

The protection of civilians, although sounding like one task, goes beyond a number of areas that affect their protection, from clear and enforceable mandates, effective training, the deployment of peacemakers and respect for human rights to creating a safe environment for return and further development of States.

Slovakia will continue to support the security sector reform agenda, whereby parties are responsible for the protection of civilians, respect for human rights, political dialogue and arms control. Civilians and citizens are #NotATarget; they are the foundation of any State. Without our protection and respect for their rights, and the creation of a habitable environment, we

fail in our fundamental role of ensuring peace. Slovakia is also a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its role in the fight against impunity and in bringing perpetrators to justice. Achieving universal jurisdiction of the ICC would be a major step in this regard.

We have come a long way in the past 20 years, but we are not there yet. Sadly, it seems that we are not even half-way there. A lot has been done to strengthen the framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, but owing to the nature of contemporary warfare, the bar keeps rising and therefore more needs to be done — on the regional level, by enhancing the compliance of non-State armed groups; on the national level, by developing national policy frameworks on the protection of civilians; and on the international level, by promoting compliance through advocacy and accountability and by continuous joint engagement and dialogue on this topic among Member States, United Nations actors and civil society.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank the Indonesian presidency for organizing this timely debate. We also thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their insightful statements.

Armed conflicts take a massive toll on people’s lives. Trapped in wars, millions of civilians are forced to flee. They are tortured, abducted, forcibly displaced and denied access to basic rights and services. Attacks on schools and hospitals further exacerbate the already dire conditions in armed conflicts. The situation of civilians in Syria, the occupied Palestinian territory, Yemen, Libya and many other parts of the world is becoming increasingly precarious.

Last month marked the eighth anniversary of the start of the Syrian crisis. Over 5.6 million people have fled Syria, seeking safety in Turkey and other neighbouring countries. There has been an increase in the regime’s violations of humanitarian law over the past few weeks. Syrians have been targeted, which will have humanitarian and security repercussions for the region and beyond.

Turkey continues to be the main corridor for the United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations into northern Syria, with 80 per cent of all cross-border operations being conducted via the Turkish border, which amounts to the movement of 31 per cent of all international humanitarian assistance into Syria. Safe,

timely and unimpeded access to recipients of that humanitarian assistance is crucial.

International humanitarian law is an important backdrop for protection. Since the signing of the Geneva Conventions, 70 years ago, joint efforts to maintain compliance with international humanitarian law are required as the nature of warfare has been ceaselessly changing, including the need for neutral and impartial humanitarian action.

Over the last 20 years, the Security Council has established a sound normative framework for the protection of civilians by adopting various resolutions and presidential statements. The Council should maintain that practice and act to stop serious violations of international humanitarian law. Preventing and addressing the root causes of conflict should also be at the top of our agenda. On the other hand, Member States have their own experiences and best practices, and that should be duly reflected in the work of the United Nations.

The Security Council should be mindful of the increasing number of international humanitarian law violations and make sure that resolutions in this area, in particular resolutions 2286 (2016) and 2417 (2018), are fully implemented. That includes United Nations peacekeeping missions implementing their protection mandates. The task of protecting civilians is indispensable, as armed conflicts are becoming increasingly brutal.

It has been estimated that 40 million people have been internally displaced in their own countries as a result of armed conflict and violence, while the number of refugees and asylum seekers has reached 28.5 million. We hope that the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees will make a real difference in the lives of refugees and improve responsibility-sharing among States.

This week marks the third anniversary of the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit, which put strong emphasis on protection. If we are sincere about living up to the commitments made at the Summit, we should devote more energy and resources to protection. Protecting civilians, saving lives and restoring dignity should remain at the centre of our efforts. That is our duty as we seek to help the millions who are suffering deeply from aggression, oppression and discrimination, in their own lands and beyond.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation has read the concept note for this meeting (S/2019/385, annex). We appreciate the efforts made by the permanent delegation of Indonesia in preparing it.

My delegation has also read the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Protection of civilians in armed conflict" (S/2019/373). I would like to express my Government's absolute reservation about describing its war, along with its allies, against the terrorist groups Al-Qaida, Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front, as well as armed groups associated with them, as an armed conflict. We also have many comments and national Syrian reservations with respect to the erroneous assessments and incomplete information and conclusions contained in the report, which we will transmit to the Secretariat in an official letter.

The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the States concerned and their sovereign institutions, given that they alone are responsible for preserving security and stability on their territories. They are responsible for fighting terrorism, violence and crime, and for putting an end to all forms of armed presence or illegal weapons. The Indonesian Minister spoke of this matter in her opening statement, for which we thank her.

On the basis established by national constitutions and recognized by the Charter of the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Republic will pursue its cooperation with its allies and respect its obligations and right to protect its citizens from terrorist armed groups that continue to harbour in their ranks tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters who have come to Syria from more than 100 States Members of this Organization. This assessment is documented in reports of committees and teams associated with the Security Council and specialized in fighting terrorism. This talk is not Government propaganda. It is documented in the reports of the various counter-terrorism subsidiary committees of the Security Council.

The Syrian people have suffered from a terrorist war for more than eight years that is supported, funded and interfered in by certain Governments of States that are well known as sponsors of trans-border international terrorism. However, thanks to its genuine allies that respect the purposes and principles of the Charter, the

Syrian State has been able to preserve the work of its various national institutions. We have fought terrorism steadfastly and without hesitation. In parallel, the Syrian Government, in cooperation with the Russian Government and other friends, has been able to take important measures that contributed to putting an end to bloodshed, protecting civilians and restoring security. Some of those measures are as follows.

First, the wide range national reconciliation processes has made it possible for thousands of fighters to lay down their illegal weapons in exchange for amnesty.

Secondly, through Astana agreement, we were able to establish de-escalation zones that contributed to halting most of the fighting and restoring the presence and control of the Syrian State over most of the territories previously under the control of terrorists who belonged to Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front and the armed terrorist groups associated with them.

Thirdly, there is full involvement in the political process in cooperation with Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in Syria, based on resolution 2254 (2015), which states that a political process should be facilitated under Syrian leadership and without foreign interference. That criterion is not respected by many States, however, which are preventing the process from moving forward by interfering in a negative and destructive way in the decision-making process, which is supposed to be a Syrian-led process.

We are still facing a moral and legal crisis as well as a crisis of trust, all of which is hindering the collective international efforts in the framework of the United Nations. Some Governments have destroyed the capabilities of entire countries, such as Libya, under the pretext of protecting civilians. Some Governments are erroneously interpreting the principles of the Charter and international law to justify military aggression and occupation under the pretext of protecting civilians. Some Governments are imposing unilateral economic measures on populations of countries such as Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, Iran and North Korea. Those Governments consider their policies of illegal economic terrorism to be a part of preventive diplomacy. Some Governments still strongly and unflinchingly defend Israel's continued occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan while seeking unsustainable deals that are doomed to fail.

Protecting civilians and peoples across the world without exception or discrimination begins with respect for the Charter, without manipulating it or distorting its principles to justify military aggression and interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

We all agree that the key mandate of the Security Council is to maintain international peace and security, prevent conflicts and address the deep-rooted causes of armed conflict. On that basis, we now have a real opportunity to address the issue seriously and examine its root causes. This opportunity begins by getting answers to direct questions. What were the pretexts for occupying Iraq and destroying all of its potential? That was 17 years ago. Yet we have not heard an apology from those who invaded Iraq, or a justification for what they did, or the taking of responsibility for that.

What is the justification for the aggression against Libya and destroying the country? The same pretext. With all arrogance and insolence, Libya was invaded under the pretext of protecting civilians. Libya was partitioned and there is currently an armed conflict there, which everyone knows about. Libya's resources are plundered, amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars in value. The Libyan people were driven to disagree among themselves about the Libyan Constitution under the pretext of protecting civilians in Libya. Why is it that well-known Governments of certain countries — some of them are permanent members of the Security Council — participated in the dirty terrorist war against my country, Syria?

Today we put those questions to the Security Council. And we want answers. We must have the courage to recognize that there are Governments of certain countries with political, military and economic influence working openly and covertly to make Member States of this Organization laboratories for their bloody experiments, in defiance of the Charter. Those countries are the cause of tensions and conflicts, igniting fires the world over and then playing the role of firemen or corrupt policemen.

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

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to express my appreciation to the Indonesian presidency for holding this important open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for presenting his report (S/2019/373) on the issue before us.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

Unfortunately, little has changed since the first Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, 20 years ago (see S/PV.4046). We have 14 reports of the Secretary-General, with more than 200 recommendations on the issue, but we still cannot ensure the protection of the most vulnerable strata of the population.

The development of new technologies in recent years should have improved the ability of the international community to protect humankind from the devastating consequences of war. Yet those technologies are building a world that pays little heed to the demands of reality. And the reality is that global and human security have deteriorated markedly in the past decade. Peace and security indicators continue to regress, bringing to new heights the number of deliberate acts of violence against those protected under international humanitarian law.

It is therefore imperative that the cornerstones of international humanitarian law adopted and recognized by the international community be fully respected and protected from any attempts to demolish them. Accountability for war crimes, violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights should become the new normal.

Regrettably, Ukraine has become an example of the consequences of a violation by one of the permanent members of the Security Council of the norms and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law. In that regard, we value the fact that the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians reflects the dire situation of the civilians affected by the Russian military aggression in Donbas in Ukraine. We are also grateful to the Polish delegation for raising that issue so eloquently in its statement earlier.

The Russian-led war in Donbas has plunged the lives of the civilian population into a vortex of destruction and death. As of now, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the civilian death toll stands at more than 3,300. Every third civilian killed is a woman or child. Just in February, a bus carrying civilians was blown up near the village of Olenivka, in the Donetsk region. Two civilians died on the spot as the result of an anti-tank mine explosion.

The hostilities also threaten the population with unprecedented environmental catastrophe, not only for Ukraine but the whole of Europe. In the Donbas region, an ever-present risk from groundwater pollution and subsidence, due to improper closures and subsequent flooding of coal mines, highlight the need to take the necessary measures to prevent an environmental disaster. The decision by the Russian occupation authorities to cease groundwater pumping at the Yunkom mine, used in Soviet times for nuclear testing, endangers groundwater, rivers and, ultimately, the Sea of Azov with radioactive contamination.

Moreover, the Donetsk filtration station, a facility that holds huge stocks of chlorine, remains under constant shelling by the Russian occupation forces. An accident at that station could be of a scale like the Chernobyl disaster. They also continue to plant landmines. The unexploded remnants of war continue multiplying in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, especially in densely populated areas. That has already made Ukraine one of the most landmine-contaminated countries in the world, with almost half of civilian deaths being caused by landmines.

As a party to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and its Protocols Additional, Ukraine attaches great importance to enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The recently adopted mine-action law establishes the framework for humanitarian demining in Ukraine, which enables the minimization of risks for people living in mine-contaminated areas.

Ukraine and many members of the Council recently expressed their deep concern about the provocative and unlawful decision to issue Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. That step could further curtail the human rights of the local civilian population and provoke a dangerous escalation of the situation. We must recall that imposing citizenship on the residents of an occupied territory can be equated to compelling them to swear allegiance to a Power that they may consider hostile, which is forbidden under the Fourth Geneva Convention. In view of what I have stated here, this dangerous development must be duly reflected on and assessed in the next report of the Secretary-General. Time and again, we continue to urge Russia to uphold all its obligations under applicable international law as an occupying Power.

In conclusion, I would like to underline Ukraine's strong commitment to the protection of civilians and ensuring accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law on its territory.

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

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): I would like to start by thanking the Indonesian presidency for convening this meeting.

The year 2019 marks the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions on international humanitarian law. It also marks the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999). The protection of civilians in armed conflict has long been one of the core issues in the Security Council, and a number of related resolutions have been adopted.

Resolution 2286 (2016), adopted in May 2016, on which Japan was a co-penholder, expresses the strong and unanimous commitment of the Council to protect health care in armed conflict. However, it is regrettable to learn, according to the World Health Organization, that the number of the attacks on health care has been increasing, even after the resolution was adopted. Noting that most of those attacks have been perpetrated in Syria, Japan must once again insist that all parties to the conflict, State and non-State actors alike, especially those in Syria, fully observe the resolution and international humanitarian law. The Council needs to take further action in order to see tangible improvements.

Let me refer to women and peace and security, another priority of Japan's linked to today's debate. The Council has made great effort to address the issue by adopting a series of resolutions since resolution 1325 (2000), including resolution 2467 (2019), which was adopted in April and which Japan co-sponsored. All Member States, including Security Council members, need to act on those resolutions. As a leading donor, Japan has contributed to their implementation, in cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, UN-Women and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in the following three areas.

First, with regard to accountability, since 2014, Japan has supported the work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict — in the

Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Somalia and Iraq — in order to improve their capabilities in the areas of legislation, investigation and prosecution. Through those efforts, cases of sexual violence have been brought into domestic judicial bodies, resulting in judgments and sentences.

Secondly, with regard to survivors, following the human security approach, Japan has supported projects of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict to care for children born of rape and their mothers in Iraq and improve access to justice for survivors of sexual violence in Jordan.

Thirdly, with regard to prevention, in cooperation with UN-Women and the ICRC, Japan has supported women's empowerment at the community level through training and cash-for-work programmes in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

The Secretary-General has stressed the importance of assisting national-level initiatives to ensure compliance and accountability. Japan continues to provide such assistance, in cooperation with the United Nations system and civil society. Japan will also continue to actively engage in future discussions on this issue at the United Nations.

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

Mr. Skinner-Klée Arenales (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Republic of Indonesia, in particular Minister Marsudi for convening this open debate, for circulating the concept note (S/2019/385, annex) that serves as the basis for our deliberations.

Guatemala reaffirms that the protection of civilians and all other peacekeeping tasks must be implemented in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the guiding principles governing peacekeeping operations.

Armed conflicts are increasingly taking place in urban centres. We all know that explosive weapons in populated areas cause serious injuries to civilians and affect services that are essential to their survival. We therefore strongly condemn the use of those weapons in populated areas, not only because of their grave consequences but also because they violate the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Protocols Additional, as the Secretary-General reminded us this morning. In that regard, we address an urgent

appeal to the international community to adopt all the measures necessary to provide a protection and security framework for those who suffer from the consequences of the indiscriminate use of those deadly weapons, and at the same time offer them protection and relief, especially for the most vulnerable.

It is important to stress that the Latin American and Caribbean region expressed its unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians in the Santiago communiqué, in which 23 States, including Guatemala, together with international organizations, agreed on additional actions to address this problem at the national, regional and international levels.

To a large extent, threats to international peace and security remain the cause of the proliferation and possession of weapons of mass destruction, which pose a threat to human safety and innocent populations.

With regard to the civilian protection component of United Nations peacekeeping operations, my delegation recognizes that the implementation of those mandates should be considered part of an integral peace process, bolstered by national ownership and involving relevant stakeholders, and should be decisively supported by the international community.

Guatemala stresses that the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations must be carried out in accordance with missions' mandates and be applied to all prevention activities and responses to acts of violence against civilians, including the use of force as a last resort when necessary, as well as to clear rules of engagement in order to provide security to civilians under threat of physical violence and within the areas of operations.

As a country that contributes troops to peacekeeping operations, in particular our special forces in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we note the launch of the pilot protection-through-projection model, which stipulates that both military and civilian personnel should be highly mobile and, at the first sign of deterioration in the security situation, be able to deploy temporarily to prevent conflict and avoid violence. My delegation requests that the Secretariat provide detailed information on compliance on the ground and the impact and implementation of each of those mandates.

For my delegation, it is also important that a clear, objective and timely assessment of the human and

material resources be carried out, together with the available capacities, in each peacekeeping operation. The implementation of mandates depends up on a number of critical factors, including, among others, that they be well defined, realistic and achievable; that there be political will and leadership of the mission's performance and accountability at all levels; as well as planning and operational guidelines. Guatemala therefore takes this opportunity to reiterate that peacekeeping operations should receive sufficient resources and training to execute their tasks, including personnel, mobility assets and capabilities to gather timely, reliable and actionable information on threats to civilians, including analytical tools to use that information.

Any type of attack against civilians, hospitals, schools, cultural goods or churches, as well as the recruitment of children and the hindering of humanitarian access, is a flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions. It is therefore necessary for the Security Council to remain committed to protecting civilians in armed conflict and foster full respect for international law in order to put an end to impunity for serious violations committed against civilians.

Against that backdrop, and in order to support the protection of civilians, Guatemala is honoured to be a country that contributes to maintaining and sustaining peace. From our national perspective, the responsibility to protect is a standard that coincides with our own constitutional principles, as the State is organized to protect individuals and families, with the overarching goal of achieving shared well-being.

Lastly, my country reiterates its commitment to the responsibility to protect. We call for all States Members to strictly abide by that commitment and put aside indifference to the commission of serious crimes and human suffering.

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

Mr. Kakanur (India): We thank the delegation of Indonesia for organizing this open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General and the other briefers for their remarks.

It is our impression that there is no dearth of intent to better the protection of civilians in armed conflict situations. However, it is obvious that the

implementation of this concept does not match the expectations. We need to translate the concept into feasible actions and operational responses.

The well-established norms to limit the effects of conflict include respecting international humanitarian law and other relevant human rights laws by all parties to a conflict and ensuring safe and unhindered access for medical and humanitarian agencies to assist people. Today's challenges are not the result of the absence of norms, but of the inability to abide by the established norms.

The protection of civilians is a vast subject. In view of the time constraints, I would like to limit my remarks to the application of this concept in the context of United Nations peacekeeping missions mandated by the Security Council.

It is our experience that peacekeepers often rise to the occasion when required. Let me recall the example of Captain Salaria, who led an Indian infantry brigade group as part of United Nations Operation in the Congo in November 1961. That mission, whose objective was to restore peace and unity in the Congo and protect the lives of the civilian population in Elizabethville, resulted in the highest number of casualties suffered by India in any United Nations operation — 39 personnel laid down their lives. That was at a time when the protection of civilians was not part of peacekeeping mandates.

The protection of civilians in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations has been a complex undertaking because of the vastly different nature of armed conflicts, possible contradictions with the long-standing agreed principles of United Nations peacekeeping, limitations of the mandates, and the serious inadequacy of the resources made available for peacekeeping missions. While the issue continues to be debated in the Security Council, which has already adopted several resolutions and other documents focused on the concept, those efforts have, however, not really helped in addressing the main challenges.

The difficulties involved in achieving the aims of the protection of civilians are well known. The general tendency is to assume — wrongly — that the protection of civilians is the responsibility of the parties to the conflict, or of peacekeepers and humanitarian organizations. However, the responsibility primarily rests with the national Governments. Yet very little is done in terms of strengthening national or societal capacities for protection. Outside agencies can only

supplement, and not supplant, the responsibility of national Governments.

The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2019/373) clearly identifies that mandating certain peacekeeping missions to participate in, or conduct, military operations against armed groups, or otherwise conduct joint operations with non-United Nations forces in specific contexts, has generated important challenges for the performance of other mandated activities, including the protection of civilians. That also jeopardizes the credibility and the image of the United Nations neutral presence in armed conflict situations. While eight of the current 14 United Nations peacekeeping missions include the protection of civilians as one of their mandates, that aspect is only one of the many other mandated components, which number at least 10 on average, that each of those missions is individually expected to fulfil. It is clear that the expectations that United Nations peacekeepers can effectively ensure the protection of civilians in the absence of clear mandates are not realistic.

Conflicts where peacekeeping operations are deployed are inherently messy, complex and difficult. However, those factors should not be taken as an excuse to accept the devastating impact of conflict on civilians. A number of courses of action, mechanisms and processes are available to address the operational issues. It is up to the Council to harness them in a collaborative effort. The commitments under the Action for Peacekeeping initiative provide a foundation to tackle some of the challenges and further strengthen the protective role of peacekeepers. That requires a collective endeavour, including Member States and the Secretariat, to adapt to changing environments.

It is also useful to consider developing a normative architecture for the protection of civilians as part of a broader endeavour within a framework that is politically attuned, but not politicized or seen as being instrumentalized. It is only then will we be able to move forward with cohesion to address issues that have exacted a heavy price in civilian lives.

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

Mr. Kafle (Nepal): Allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on this important issue, which is a true tribute to marking the seventieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of the inclusion of the

protection of civilians in armed conflict on the Security Council's agenda. I also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their respective briefings. I am grateful to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/373) on this issue.

Durable peace can be secured only through dialogue and engagement, not through ravaging war or military actions. The loss of lives and human dignity in wars and violent conflicts is irreparable. Injury and pain inflicted upon innocent civilians is deplorable. We must act to protect civilians during conflicts. The primacy of politics, and particularly inclusive politics and constant dialogue, should be upheld to address the root cause of conflicts. While a State has the primary responsibility to protect its civilians, it is the shared duty of the international community, including the relevant United Nations bodies, to prevent violence against them should the State fail to do so. As recommended by the Secretary-General in his report, national capacities to develop policy frameworks on the protection of civilians should be strengthened. The sharing of experiences and good practices will be helpful in that regard.

Nepal expresses its support for the international normative framework for the protection of civilians and underscores the need for reinforcing existing standards and their effective implementation. Children, women, the wounded and other vulnerable groups should be provided special attention, as they suffer disproportionately in armed conflicts.

The provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional should be observed in letter and spirit by all parties in conflict. Human rights law and international humanitarian law are inviolable even in the worst-case scenarios. Those who promote indiscriminate and disproportional attacks on civilian populations and civilian objects should be held accountable.

Nepal's own experience in its nationally led peace process has shown the significance of the promotion of social harmony, tolerance and understanding for ensuring the protection of civilians during conflicts and peace processes. Local communities should be informed and involved, as they are directly or indirectly affected by conflicts and their aftermath. Local leaders and youth and women organizations have a crucial role to play in strengthening the social fabric and increasing

the opportunity costs of relapse into conflict. Likewise, investment in education and generating awareness and employment can make a difference in the long run.

As one of the major contributors of United Nations peacekeepers, Nepal takes every possible measure to train its peacekeepers in the protection of civilians. We have put in place a thorough vetting process and predeployment and in-theatre awareness training on international humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as robust punitive measures for those convicted in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.

In conclusion, I wish to highlight the importance of providing adequate resources to peacekeeping missions to carry out their mandate of the protection of civilians, as it is a challenging mandate in the face of dwindling resources. To enable peacekeepers to fully shoulder that responsibility, we must ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers themselves so that we can boost their morale to achieve enhanced performance.

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

Mr. Ham Sang Wook (Republic of Korea): Please allow me to begin by commending your initiative, Mr. President, to convene today's open debate on this critical issue. It is all the more meaningful as this year marks the seventieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, as well as the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's inclusion of the protection of civilians in armed conflict as an important item on its agenda.

Since its adoption, the protection of civilians in armed conflict has established itself as one of the core issues on the Security Council's agenda, and the Council's efforts to that end have yielded practical actions and successes. However, despite 20 years of progress, civilians still remain disproportionately the victims of armed conflict. The Secretary-General reports that, throughout 2018, tens of thousands of civilians were killed, injured or maimed due to armed conflicts around the world. The serious impacts of conflict on civilians, including sexual and gender-based violence, forced displacement and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access, continue to persist. Against that backdrop, I would like to stress the following three points.

First, to protect civilians in armed conflict, we need to focus on prevention. As the Secretary-General

has highlighted, prevention is the paradigm-shifting approach that closes the gap between commitment and reality. That supports the trend commonly underscored by the reviews on peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture, and the women and peace and security agenda. In that sense, the Republic of Korea has been a champion of United Nations reform efforts so that the United Nations system can effectively support the peacebuilding priorities of Member States in addressing the challenges on the ground in a holistic manner. Prevention and sustaining peace were at the heart of our efforts as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2017 and 2018. We are consistently increasing our financial contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme. That is geared towards strengthening the international community's ongoing efforts in the promotion of prevention and sustaining peace.

Secondly, we must elevate our level of effort in protecting vulnerable groups of civilians such as women and children. The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373) highlights the fact that conflict-related sexual violence persists in many armed conflicts, often as part of a broader strategy. In addition, armed conflict continued to have a destabilizing impact on children throughout the past year. One tragic example was in Afghanistan, where a record high of 927 children were killed due to conflict in 2018 alone.

In June 2018 the Government of the Republic of Korea launched the Action with Women and Peace Initiative, with a particular focus on protecting women from sexual violence in armed conflict. In Seoul in July we will be proud to host the first international conference under this important initiative to strengthen global partnership in combating sexual violence in conflict. Furthermore, as a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, the Republic of Korea is stepping up its efforts to support the reintegration of former child soldiers, who are also victims of armed conflict. We believe that a more comprehensive and well-funded reintegration programme will help to fundamentally break the vicious cycle of violence.

Thirdly, in order to improve the implementation of protection-of-civilian mandates in peacekeeping operations, peacekeepers should be better trained to engage with local communities, and training guidelines

should be expressly produced for this purpose. Korean peacekeepers have long been guided by the conviction that genuine peace takes root in people's minds, and they have worked hard to win the hearts and minds of local populations. Such efforts have helped them to deliver on mandates while enhancing their own safety and security. Many of today's conflicts begin with local disputes over land, resources or authority over a district and then escalate, and community engagement can help to address such local conflict dynamics. In that regard, mission personnel should be encouraged to improve their in-depth knowledge of host societies, cultures and institutions, as well as their command of local languages.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the Republic of Korea's commitment to working with the United Nations and all Member States with a view to improving the protection of vulnerable populations in armed conflict.

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

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I would like to thank Indonesia for convening today's open debate.

As we all know, 2019 marks the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's decision to put the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict on its agenda. It is therefore an important time to review and reflect.

The rules for the conduct of hostilities in armed conflicts are clearly codified in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. They constitute the bedrock of international humanitarian law governing the protection of civilians and victims of armed conflict. Yet we would all agree that we continue to witness the flouting of international humanitarian law whenever and wherever hostilities break out, with women often bearing the brunt of these atrocities. The cardinal principles of distinction and discrimination between civilians and combatants, military necessity and proportionality continue to be violated, and warring parties continue to operate with impunity. Whether one believes it is plausible deniability or abuse, the grim reality is that when the beast of conflict roars, legal regimes fall silent.

The violation of international humanitarian law triggers cycles of endless violence. It ostracizes and

divides. Today targeted attacks, sexual violence, forced conscription, torture, indiscriminate killings and gross human rights violations are used cynically as tools of war in conflicts. In Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, the occupying forces continue to show utter disregard for human life by systematically violating the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law and using civilians as human shields. Worse, the perpetrators of such crimes are not only protected under black laws but are honoured by the military command. Reports of the use of torture as an instrument of repression in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir have been verified by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions and torture, and by prominent rights groups in India. For example, a recent evidence-based report once again draws attention to the culture of impunity and lists multiple cases involving chilling methods used to torture civilians.

Civilians, who should be the primary subject of protection, have become the principal objectives of attack. Last year alone, according to the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians (S/2019/373), more than 22,000 civilians were killed, injured or maimed as a result of direct or indiscriminate attacks by parties to conflicts, while 1.4 million people were made refugees and a further 5.2 million displaced internally. I would quickly like to underscore five specific points in that regard.

First, the protection of civilians is a system-wide undertaking, but host countries bear the primary responsibility for protecting all civilians, without discrimination.

Secondly, the protection of civilians, wherever mandated by the Council, should be a priority for United Nations peacekeeping operations. As one of the world's leading troop contributors to United Nations peacekeeping, Pakistan sends well-trained and professional peacekeepers who have protected civilians, provided them with much-needed medical care and rebuilt communities.

Thirdly, violations are neither inevitable nor insurmountable. They can be mitigated by consistent use of the entire range of national and international judicial and non-judicial means for promoting compliance with international humanitarian law and ensuring accountability.

Fourthly, a lack of the political will needed to fully respect humanitarian law and other applicable rules

is the primary impediment to protecting civilians in armed conflict. Sustained pressure from those with influence over parties to conflicts can obviously rectify that wrong.

Fifth, the Security Council, as the primary body tasked with maintaining international peace and security, should focus on the root causes of emerging and long-standing conflicts, including those in Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir, and find just solutions. Inaction by the Council in cases of foreign aggression or occupation comes at a high human cost, but unfortunately we continue to see legal and moral values sacrificed at the altar of political expediency.

I would like to conclude by saying that we should be mindful that the spirit of the Geneva Conventions is about upholding human dignity even in the midst of war, and it is as important today as it was 70 years ago. After all, conventions are law, and the law must always be upheld. The goal of the protection of civilians can best be achieved by preventing the outbreak of armed conflict in the first place. Anything short of that would be to treat only the symptoms and not the disease.

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

Mr. Petkus (Lithuania): I would like to begin by commending Indonesia, as President of the Security Council for the month of May, for convening this exceptionally important open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their contributions to our discussion.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/373) devoted to the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions, which form the universally accepted cornerstone of international humanitarian law. Today, 70 years later, it is still relevant that the Conventions' guarantees are provided for all protected persons, and particularly civilians who do not take a direct part in hostilities, as well as civilians living under occupation. I would like to focus on the protection of populations in the hands of an occupying Power. That is the general subject of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which requires the

humanitarian treatment of civilians throughout a period of occupation.

Lithuania, as a country once illegally annexed and occupied by the Soviet Union, has a particular understanding of the crimes and horrors that can be committed without regard to the law of occupation. One does not even have to refer to the pages of history to find relevant case studies, as Georgia, Ukraine and other countries are suffering from the same illegal conduct in today's world. We therefore call on all States Members of the United Nations to uphold international humanitarian law in occupied territories.

The duties of the occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention are numerous. The lack of ongoing hostilities should not prevent us from making sure that the rights of the civilian population are respected, as the established protection guarantees are applicable for the whole duration of occupation. One example stands out in particular in that regard. This year, on 24 April, a decree was issued to facilitate the acquisition of Russian nationality by residents from various districts of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions, notably without taking up residency in Russia. That ongoing mass extraterritorial naturalization — the so-called passportization policy — by the Russian Federation in the occupied territories of Ukraine is a clear violation of the law of occupation and must be condemned immediately by the Members of the United Nations. The granting of nationality is a manifestation of the conferring State's sovereignty. Historical experience in Georgia shows that it may be employed as a rhetorical justification for the use of force.

Let me turn to peacekeeping. Last year, Lithuania adhered to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians — a best-practices initiative for protecting civilians in peacekeeping operations. Since then, nearly 200 Lithuanian peacekeepers have been comprehensively trained on their legal commitments in respect of the civilian population on the ground. The protection of civilians requires the commitment of the members of the Security Council to find consensus around the language and implications of peacekeeping tasks, including by providing clarity on the expectations of peacekeepers and the recognition of situations that may be outside of their capacity to respond. We are nevertheless convinced that the mandated protection of civilians must become a task of every United Nations peacekeeping mission. In that respect, the commitments under the Action for Peacekeeping

initiative also provide a foundation to tackle some of those challenges and further strengthen the protective role of peacekeepers.

The Security Council's efforts to give practical meaning to the protection of civilians agenda would be fruitless without enhancing accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Irrespective of the challenges faced by the International Criminal Court, we must continue to support its mandate. We call on States to adhere to the commitments established by the Rome Statute and to cooperate fully with the investigative bodies of the Court.

In addition, the Council has promoted and encouraged support for accountability at the national level, while emphasizing the responsibility of States to investigate, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of serious violations. The commissions, mechanisms and other investigative bodies established by the United Nations are also important tools that must be encouraged in order to ensure the preservation of evidence for future investigations. Enhancing and ensuring respect for the law and accountability for its violation are two of the greatest challenges we face in strengthening the protection of civilians. Yet efforts to ensure accountability remain insufficient and do not meet the bar set by binding international treaties, as we observe growing resistance from different States and non-State actors in implementing their commitments to that end.

The international community must collectively turn this worrisome tide. We urge Security Council members, the Secretary-General and all Member States to take determined action to strengthen the protection of civilians and stand up for the norms and laws that are essential to safeguarding civilians in conflict.

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

Mr. Giacomelli da Silva (Brazil): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this debate, as well as the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/373) and the briefers for their insightful presentations.

Brazil associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Twenty years have passed since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999). As we celebrate that milestone, we should recognize our progress in mainstreaming the protection of civilians in the Security Council's work. At the same time, we should reflect on the reasons for which the state of the protection of civilians today is tragically similar to that of 20 years ago, as the Secretary-General indicates in his report.

No one disputes the evolution of the Council's treatment of the protection of civilians agenda, from providing broad guidance to increasingly detailed and prescriptive language. About 95 per cent of peacekeeping operations today include a protection of civilians mandate, and considerations related to the protection of civilians form part of sanctions regimes. Yet this robust protection of civilians architecture has not been sufficient to reduce the heavy civilian toll of armed conflict. But that should not be seen as a failure of our efforts. It should rather be understood as a stark reminder of the human devastation that any armed conflict causes as well as a clear call to prevent them.

Force should be used only as a last resort. We were therefore pleased to see that the Indonesian presidency had chosen prevention as one of the main topics for this debate. We also agree with the assessment contained in the concept note (S/2019/385, annex) that the engagement of local and affected communities plays an instrumental role in increasing national capacity to prevent conflict escalation. Local ownership is linked to a broad understanding of conflict prevention. It ranges from addressing exclusion, intolerance and other grievances at the root of conflict, to placing genuine emphasis on the peaceful settlement of disputes. Understanding local concerns and sensitivities helps to build trust between affected communities and United Nations peacekeepers, thereby contributing to their preventive work in protecting civilians. Finally, when everything else fails and civilians are not spared, local community engagement is essential in promoting accountability and fighting impunity.

This year we are also celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. We are appalled to see that, in many instances, civilian deaths do not represent minor casualties of military action. Brazil strongly condemns the blatant violations of international humanitarian law. When violations occur, they must be investigated impartially and their perpetrators must be held accountable. In that regard, Brazil reiterates the central role of the International

Criminal Court, and remains a steadfast supporter of the universality of the Rome Statute.

In order to effectively protect civilians, peacekeeping operations must have realistic mandates with feasible tasks from military, political and legal perspectives. They must also be provided with adequate capabilities and resources. In addition, we need to acknowledge the proven benefits that an increased presence of women in peacekeeping brings to areas including, but not limited to, the protection of civilians, especially in the light of the continued use of conflict-related sexual violence, often as part of a broader strategy. Brazil welcomes the recent adoption of resolution 2467 (2019) and encourages further related efforts by the Council as we approach the twentieth anniversary of the women and peace and security agenda.

Finally, protection mandates must also factor in the specifics of each situation. Brazil understands the need for greater consistency on the protection of civilians agenda as a call for unbiased and responsible action, and not as a defence of one-size-fits-all approaches.

Let me express our hope that, 20 years from now, we will be witnesses to a better scenario — one in which respect for international humanitarian law will have become the norm and, most importantly, one in which we will have achieved the first objective of the Organization, which is to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. For that, we need to do more in preventing armed conflict, including through the active engagement of local and affected communities in the implementation of protection of civilian measures.

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

Mr. Santos Maraver (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/373) and Mr. Mauer and Mr. Borello for their briefings.

Pursuant to the excellent concept note (S/2019/385, annex) submitted by the Indonesian presidency, this open debate takes place in the context of a number of important anniversaries this year, as has already been mentioned in many of today's statements, with the aim of reflecting on the work carried out for the protection of civilians. In that regard, in the case of Spain, I should like to mention the annual retreat on

international humanitarian law, which the Spanish Mission organizes with the support of the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross and to which we invite members of the Security Council, other Member States, agencies, programmes and the Secretariat of the Organization, and representatives of civil society and the academic world.

At this year's retreat, held in March, the focus was on the protection provided for under international humanitarian law to civilian infrastructure, especially hospitals and schools, given that the two priority issues for Spain on this agenda are the protection of health care in conflict and the protection of access to education. The protection of all health and humanitarian personnel dedicated exclusively to medical missions is a very clear, direct obligation under international law, as recalled and demanded in resolution 2286 (2016), of which Spain was a co-penholder and which was adopted by the Security Council during the open debate in May 2016 (see S/PV.7685).

However, according to the latest Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition report, in 2018 there were at least 973 attacks in 23 countries, representing an increase of 38 per cent from 2017. As a result of those attacks, at least 167 health workers died and 710 were injured. Here, I should like to acknowledge their dedication and sacrifice. Those 167 deaths should not have happened and must not go unpunished. In the light of those attacks, we wish to emphasize that resolution 2286 (2016) remains fully applicable. Spain is working for its full development because we believe that part of its content has yet to be put into practice, particularly with regard to the investigation and fact-finding mechanisms. Its development would allow us to make progress in verifying the correctness of the facts and in ensuring both political and criminal accountability and prevention.

Given the data before us, it cannot be denied that there is a real and concrete need for a permanent instrument responsible for clarifying data collection mechanisms; analysing that data; identifying trends, best practices and lessons; identifying ways to repair the damages caused, restore services and recover humanitarian space; as well as preparing reports and, where appropriate, investigating allegations of violations of the obligations to protect health care in conflict.

Next Tuesday and Wednesday, 28 and 29 May, Spain will host the third International Conference on Safe Schools, in Palma de Mallorca, where we expect to see a broad participation of representatives from the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Education Ministries of the 86 countries that endorsed the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration, as well as other countries that, without having yet done so, are also committed to protecting access to education.

Our goal is for the Conference to serve as an impetus for new progress, and we therefore hope that all States will participate. Based on the excellent foundations laid down at the two previous Conferences — Oslo in 2015 and Buenos Aires in 2017 — the Conference in Palma de Mallorca will serve as an exchange forum, particularly on cooperation opportunities for the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, as well as a forum for a focused discussion on: first, the gender-based impact of attacks against access to education; secondly, the military and militarized use of educational centres; and thirdly, the development of mechanisms to investigate and follow up on attacks against access to education.

Based on what I have said, it is clear that Spain is working for concrete mechanisms and actions to strengthen the protection of civilians, particularly in relation to health care in conflict and access to education, as I have detailed. We are also working on other issues, such as, first, fostering knowledge on the situation of civilian interpreters and translators who work in a context of conflict, which is why the Spanish Mission is collaborating with the non-governmental organization Red T; secondly, on situations of violence below the threshold of armed conflict, which have similar consequences for civilians; and thirdly, on the protection of civilians caught up in low-visibility conflicts or crises, especially those related to the media and donor decisions.

In December this year, the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent will be held under the theme "The power of humanity". Spain is currently preparing for that event, drawing up the commitments that it will assume, which will follow the provisions I have outlined: respect for and the full implementation of international humanitarian law and promoting the universality and integrity of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and its work. We call on States that are attending the Conference to

do so in a constructive spirit, which will allow us to continue to make progress on those issues.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians is a universal, legal and moral obligation that derives from the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and, in equal measure, from the historical trauma of the terrible wars of the twentieth century. As the Secretary-General recalls in the report underpinning today's debate, since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) the protection of civilians has become one of the central issues on the Security Council's agenda, permeating all its work. However, the situation today regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict is very similar to that of 20 years ago. The majority of the victims of armed conflict remain civilians. In order to change that, the international community must act urgently to strengthen and guarantee respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly in the conduct of hostilities, in order to effectively protect civilians in situations of armed conflict.

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

Mr. Marani (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Twenty years after the incorporation of this agenda item into our programme of work, it is crucial that the Security Council remain committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict by promoting international law, particularly humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, as well as the fight against impunity.

In the context of the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, it is imperative to recall the obligations arising from those instruments, including the Protocols Additional of 1977, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and customary international law.

Argentina believes it essential that the protection of civilians during peacekeeping operations take place within a framework of respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It is necessary to strengthen protection activities in the mandates of peacekeeping operations and to ensure that they have the resources necessary for their implementation. The use of force in response to threats of physical violence against civilians must also be authorized in accordance with the applicable legal obligations, the mandate established by the Council and the specific rules of confrontation and engagement of each mission. We believe that unarmed strategies

to protect civilians in peacekeeping operations are valuable instruments that can help promote the pursuit of peaceful solutions.

The Republic of Argentina also supports the vision centred on prevention and early warning for the mandates promoted by the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians, as well as the connection with the second pillar of the responsibility to protect — a concept that we have helped to consolidate. We believe that the protection of civilians in peace missions requires the cooperation of their military, police and civilian components. For that reason, the peacekeeping forces deployed by Argentina receive training on human rights, gender and humanitarian issues. We also have an active policy of international cooperation on prevention, and we believe it is essential to advance the mainstreaming of the women and peace and security agenda across the entire United Nations system.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, the parties to a conflict must make every effort to guarantee effective and timely access to humanitarian assistance, including shipments and materials, which enjoys special protection under international humanitarian law.

In 2018, Argentina signed the Santiago de Chile communiqué supporting the process designed to lead to the negotiation and adoption of an international political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which results in deaths, injuries and trauma to civilians, destroys essential infrastructure, creates involuntary displacement and leaves behind explosive remnants that represent a long-term threat. Argentina therefore welcomes the Secretary-General's approach to tackling this threat in his Agenda for Disarmament.

In recognizing that young people constitute a large proportion of the civilians affected by armed conflicts and that the interruption of access to education and economic opportunities has decisive consequences for peace, Argentina reiterates its call to States that have not yet done so to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. In that regard, next week in Palma de Mallorca we wish Spain a successful third International Conference on Safe Schools, in which we will be proud to participate. The Council must continue to consider specific situations, as it has done in the case of women, children, journalists and medical personnel. We want to emphasize the importance of the role of the system for the protection of children in armed conflicts,

which must receive the support it needs to fulfil its mandate. We also support the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Argentina reaffirms the effective and preventive effect of accountability mechanisms. In that regard, I would like to highlight the work of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission and the central role of the International Criminal Court. We want to point out that in accordance with its Rome Statute, the Court has jurisdiction over many attacks on civilian populations. Lastly, it is worrying that some measures in the fight against terrorism continue to affect humanitarian activities. We reiterate the General Assembly's call to States to ensure that legislation and measures against terrorism do not impede such activities.

The existing normative framework on the protection of civilians must be translated into concrete results on the ground. We hope that the Council will redouble its efforts to find the best ways to make that happen.

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

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland): I am pleased to be speaking on behalf of the members of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict — Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and my own country, Switzerland. The Group of Friends thanks the Indonesian presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate, and we also thank today's briefers for their statements.

This year we are celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which have been universally ratified and are the most important treaties governing the protection of victims of armed conflict. This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of seminal developments in the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which the Council has recalled today and which established the protection of civilians as a key aspect of the maintenance of peace and security.

The Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict welcomes the active role played by

the Council in that process. That has been reflected, for instance, in landmark resolutions on the protection of civilians and peacekeeping mandates, the inclusion of the protection of civilians in situation-specific resolutions, and the use of other Council tools to support the implementation of the protection-of-civilians agenda in concrete ways. The Group of Friends urges the Council to build on that progress by being systematic, comprehensive and consistent, both within and across situations, in prioritizing the protection of civilians in its deliberations and decisions, including by taking timely decisions aimed at preventing and ending genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, while taking into account the importance of refraining from causing further harm to civilian populations. The Council must maintain a comprehensive approach to the protection of all civilians, which includes focusing on all persons in vulnerable situations impartially. A gender-based approach is also a key component of effective protection.

It is now more necessary than ever to step up our efforts, in view of the acute challenges highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373). Indiscriminate attacks occur with appalling frequency in many contemporary conflicts. The trend in the urbanization of armed conflicts continues to develop, with its particularly severe impact on civilians and civilian facilities, especially due to the indiscriminate use of weapons in densely populated areas. Conflict-related sexual violence persists in many armed conflicts, often as part of a broader strategy. Constraints on humanitarian access are increasing. All too often, the wounded and sick, as well as medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, are intentionally attacked, along with their facilities. That is why we must redouble our efforts to implement resolution 2286 (2016), taking note in that regard of the Secretary-General's recommendations as well as the political declaration of 31 October 2017.

Children often suffer the most from the devastating effects of conflicts, and that is why we should condemn unlawful attacks on schools in the strongest terms, taking note in that regard of the Safe Schools Declaration and the Paris Principles on the recruitment of children. Armed conflict has a disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities. Journalists and media workers are also particularly targeted and should be protected, in line with resolutions 1738 (2006) and 2222 (2015). The starvation of civilian populations is

being increasingly used as a method of warfare, which is a violation of international humanitarian law, as reiterated in resolution 2417 (2018). In that regard, we welcome the ongoing discussions among States parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court regarding a proposal to amend the current legal accountability framework.

Negative trends and the heavy civilian toll of today's conflicts should not prevent us from highlighting progress and identifying avenues for action. Let us stress the benefits of compliance with norms and positive examples. Let us build an ambitious protection agenda for the 20 years to come and beyond. It is in that spirit that the Group of Friends would like to stress the following four priorities.

First, enhancing respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law is absolutely crucial. We are all obliged to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law under the Geneva Conventions. Armed conflicts are regulated by specific rules, which include those governing the conduct of hostilities, protecting the wounded and sick, as well as civilians, and providing for humanitarian access. In view of the ongoing widespread violations, we call on Member States to uphold their responsibilities and urge all States that have not already done so to consider ratifying the 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions. The Security Council must systematically demand that Member States, as well as parties to armed conflict, respect their obligations under international humanitarian law in all circumstances, including allowing and facilitating unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need. We also recall the possibility for States to make use of the good offices of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission to facilitate the restoration of an attitude of respect for international humanitarian law.

Secondly and consequently, ensuring accountability for violations of international humanitarian law is of paramount importance to demonstrate to actual or potential perpetrators that violations do not go unpunished and to deliver justice to victims. We welcome national-level investigations and prosecutions, and call on the Council to promote and encourage support for accountability at this level. In line with the principle of complementarity to national jurisdictions, when such national systems are unable or unwilling to act, accountability should be ensured through international investigative and judicial mechanisms.

In such contexts, the Council should, in a non-selective manner, use more systematically the tools at its disposal to establish facts and promote accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law, as well as violations and abuses of human rights law amounting to crimes under international law, including by making use of existing fact-finding bodies or establishing ad hoc commissions of inquiry and, when appropriate, ensuring referrals to the International Criminal Court. We call on all States to consider ratifying the Rome Statute and to fully cooperate with the Court.

Thirdly, the Security Council must ensure that relevant peacekeeping operations have a clear mandate and adequate support, including training and equipment, to carry out key protection of civilians activities. The Council should ensure that the anchoring of protection of civilians mandates in relevant peacekeeping operations forms an integral part of comprehensive peace processes, in coordination with the Secretariat, troop- and police-contributing countries and the host State. It should also systematically call for performance and accountability in the implementation of protection of civilians mandates, consistent with resolution 2436 (2018), and encourage engagement with local and affected communities.

The recommendations of the 2018 report (A/72/19) of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the commitments under the Action for Peacekeeping initiative provide a foundation to tackle some of the challenges related to the implementation of protection of civilians mandates. As we approach the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), we recall the proven benefits that an increased presence of women in peacekeeping brings to areas including, but of course not limited to, the protection of civilians.

Fourthly and finally, we call on States to ensure that counter-terrorism legislation and measures do not impede impartial humanitarian and medical activities or engagement with all relevant actors, as foreseen by international humanitarian law. We welcome, in that regard, the emphasis put on this issue in resolution 2462 (2019) and urge the Security Council to follow up consistently on its demand that all measures taken by States to counter terrorism comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. We support the call of the Secretary-General for the systematic inclusion of

safeguards for impartial humanitarian activities in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law when deciding on counter-terrorism measures.

Seventy years on, the Geneva Conventions continue to show what is possible when States have the courage to uphold norms and take responsible action. Twenty years on, the protection agenda is as relevant and pressing as ever. More consistency is needed in the global effort to enhance the protection of civilians and the implementation of the law and political commitments, both on the part of Member States and parties to conflicts and at the level of the Security Council. There is a need for ongoing and sustained Member State engagement and dialogue that go beyond the yearly open debate on the protection of civilians. We must build on the practical measures and best practices that we are discussing today. The Group of Friends is committed to doing its part and to contributing to global-level advocacy to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

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

Mr. Auväärt (Estonia): I thank you the Indonesia presidency for convening today's ministerial-level open debate on a very timely and critically important topic. Estonia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Today's debate marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), adding the protection of civilians as an item on the Security Council's agenda. After 20 years of efforts to increase the level of protection, it is highly concerning to read the assessment in the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373) that, despite some progress, increased awareness and strengthened framework on this topic, the state of the protection of civilians today is tragically similar to that of 20 years ago. In that light, we need to ask ourselves if there is anything that the international community can do differently to ensure more tangible results on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

From the Estonian side, we would like to highlight three areas where further progress needs to be made.

First, I would like to emphasize the paramount importance of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. More needs to be done in addressing the root causes of conflict, finding avenues to promote political dialogue

and creating truly inclusive societies. That entails addressing the root causes of conflict in a holistic manner and paying attention to possible shortcomings in good governance, the rule of law and sustainable development as possible contributors to tensions in societies. It is important to repeat that it is the primary responsibility of States to ensure the protection of their people.

Secondly, let me emphasize the importance of accountability. Perpetrators must be brought to justice and States must ensure that those responsible do not operate with impunity. In that regard, let me also underline the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in cases where investigations or prosecutions at the national level are not possible. We encourage States to cooperate with the ICC and the Security Council to refer matters to the ICC. In cases already referred to the ICC, the further support of the Security Council is of paramount importance. In general, greater political and financial investment is needed to ensure more tangible results in the fight against impunity.

Thirdly, in terms of preparing peacekeepers and other United Nations staff for deployment in missions, education and training in international humanitarian law have an important role to play. Such education clearly supports efforts to halt and prevent acts of violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel, as well as medical facilities. We see the value in references to mission-specific legal issues prior to deployment, and believe that they could lead to better application of international law, complement the overall training procedure of troops and raise awareness.

For our part, in Estonia we have ratified the main instruments of international humanitarian law with regard to the protection of civilians and have introduced the necessary domestic regulations for their enforcement. Every measure has been taken to ensure that our military personnel do not violate international law when carrying out their duties and that they are trained to comply with the obligations to protect civilians, as agreed by the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and stated in the Declaration of Shared Commitments of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative.

Estonia stands ready to work with all its partners to enhance capacities and work on solutions for conflict prevention and the protection of civilians, especially

women and children, who often have to endure disproportionate hardship due to armed conflict. That is also something that we are prioritizing in our effort to become an elected non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2020-2021.

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

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the 120 States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

I would ask you, Mr. President, to extend our greetings to Mrs. Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, a fellow country of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The hardships suffered by innocent civilians trapped in armed conflict tend to be compounded by deliberate, indiscriminate and, in some cases, systematic attacks that clearly violate the norms of international humanitarian law. Peacekeeping operations are of key importance to the protection of civilians, in cases where such a mandate exists, and can support national efforts, as the principle responsibility rests with the host country. That protection, however, should not be used as a pretext for United Nations military intervention in conflicts. To be effective, protection-of-civilians mandates must be clear, achievable and supported by sufficient financial, human and equipment resources. Without those conditions, the ability of operations to protect civilians is unrealistic.

The protection of civilians is one of the core issues on the agenda of the Security Council, as a result of the challenges faced by civilians in countries affected by conflict, which range from threats or attacks against them to forced displacement, food insecurity and the need for humanitarian assistance. For that reason, the Council must ensure that the norms of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, are upheld and respected. The Movement calls on all parties to armed conflicts to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the principles of precautions in attack, proportionality and distinction, by prohibiting the targeting of civilian populations and property during conflicts. The parties to any conflict are obliged to ensure that civilian facilities, schools, hospitals, means of transportation

and emergency aid, as well as other vital infrastructure, are generally protected against dangers arising from military operations.

We stress that humanitarian agencies and their personnel must respect international humanitarian law and the laws of the countries where they do their work, along with the Guiding Principles of Humanitarian Assistance, as set forth in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, among which are humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as well as the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the host countries and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unity and independence of States.

We would like to point out that 88 per cent of peacekeeping personnel deployed in the field come from non-aligned countries and are implementing protection-of-civilians mandates. Their success depends on whether personnel are trained to operate under the highest standards at all times. Every measure must therefore be taken to ensure their safety. Basing efforts on the tripartite coordination between the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Secretariat, much more can be done to involve local communities and those affected by conflict in designing and implementing measures to ensure the protection of civilians.

Lastly, the 120 States members of the Non-Aligned Movement categorically condemn all acts of violence, attacks and threats against civilian populations, which in certain instances may amount to war crimes. They also stress the importance of ensuring that those responsible are held accountable before the law, in order to break cycles of impunity and send a clear and united message of zero tolerance for such despicable acts.

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

Mr. Escalante Hasbún (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, and the Indonesian presidency for convening this open debate. We also welcome the briefings, and take note of the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373).

As we are all aware, this debate is taking place in the context of the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions, which form the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, and the twentieth anniversary

of resolution 1265 (1999), which incorporated this important issue into the Security Council's debates for the first time. El Salvador emphasizes the relevance of the spirit of that resolution and other related resolutions, which, in recognition of the international community's deep concern about the failure of guarantees in times of crisis, guide us in ensuring that international human rights and humanitarian law are upheld and respected, especially with regard to civilian populations in times of armed conflict.

My country remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian damage resulting from hostilities in populated areas. Despite all the efforts to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians is still in jeopardy. It is civilians who constitute the majority of casualties in conflict situations and their aftermath, and it is civilian children, women and men who continue to suffer from forced displacement and starvation as methods of war, who are denied access to humanitarian aid and endure sexual and gender-based violence. At the same time, we continue to see attacks on humanitarian personnel, medical facilities, civil infrastructure and the assets and livelihoods of civilian populations. As we all know, international humanitarian law lacks the instruments necessary to make its provisions binding in practice. Ultimately, the Security Council must rise to the challenge, and all its members, permanent or not, should set an example through their respect for international humanitarian law. Against that backdrop, we want to highlight the following points.

Given the unfortunate selectivity that we see in the practice of respecting international humanitarian law, as evidenced by intensifying hostilities and increasing complaints of violations with serious, credible and documented evidence, there is an urgent need for more effective and robust approaches through national policies on the protection of civilians in all Member States, which should establish harm-mitigation teams and develop risk and impact assessments for all actions in populated areas, and incorporate the principles of international law into all defence policies.

One of the greatest failures in that regard is accountability. It is therefore important to enhance the capacities of judicial institutions, both nationally and internationally, and provide them with adequate resources. Accountability should respond to the need to offer reparations to survivors of violations of international humanitarian law, and Council members

have an obligation to lead the way, collectively and individually.

There is overwhelming evidence that the use of weapons can have a long-term impact on the recovery and development of affected communities. It is therefore essential to identify the obvious links between violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and the export and indiscriminate use of weapons. Without compromising their right to ensure their national defence, States should refrain from exporting conventional arms and ammunition to places where they are likely to be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law. In other words, the implementation of international humanitarian law goes hand in hand with respect for and the universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty, the Ottawa Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and all its Protocols, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

In that regard, we welcome the high priority that the Secretary-General accords the issue of explosive weapons in populated areas in his new Agenda for Disarmament, and we are grateful for his call for all States to support the development of measures to address the humanitarian impact of such weapons. We firmly believe that that can be achieved with adequate political will and through the development of shared operational policies and standards and the exchange of good practices. We hope that the Security Council will take the initiative to draft a political declaration in those terms so as to progress from words to concrete action.

In conclusion, we want to acknowledge the praiseworthy efforts of humanitarian workers, including medical personnel, in areas of conflict. We condemn all attacks on them, which are unacceptable and may constitute war crimes. We also want to acknowledge the efforts of civil society in empowering and giving a voice to those affected by armed violence.

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

Mr. Vaultier Mathias (Portugal) (*spoke in French*): I would like to commend you for convening this open debate, Mr. President.

Portugal attaches particular importance to the protection of civilians and aligns itself with the

statement to be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union. We would also like to make some additional remarks in our national capacity.

The celebration of the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians, reminds us of the urgent need to strengthen the protection of populations affected by armed conflict, in strict compliance with international humanitarian law. In that regard, Portugal subscribes to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which provide a committed and guiding framework for our collective action, and we encourage other Member States to accede to them.

Our first priority should be the application and execution of existing directives and commitments. The Security Council should enhance its activities for the protection of civilians. As a member of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, we call on the Security Council to systematically and consistently demand that Member States and parties to armed conflicts fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law. In that regard, it is deplorable that starvation is increasingly being used as a weapon of war, in violation of international humanitarian law. We therefore welcome the ongoing debate among the States parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on altering the current legal framework with regard to accountability, as proposed by Switzerland.

The latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373) stresses the importance of prevention. As we are aware, violence against civilians is often a predictor of conflict. It is therefore all the more important for the United Nations and Member States to further invest in early-warning and early-action mechanisms to ensure the protection of civilians. I would also like to express particular support for the work of Adama Dieng, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and Karen Smith, the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect.

Portugal's commitment to the principles of the protection of civilians can be seen in its participation in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, in which the Portuguese contingent plays a particularly active role in protecting the population. Portugal ensures

that all its forces and national divisions are trained in international humanitarian law and human rights so that they can fully execute their tasks, including the protection of civilians, when that is at stake.

Since protracted conflicts and extreme violence usually result in mass displacement, it is also essential to ensure the protection of internally displaced persons and refugees, without neglecting the issue of missing persons.

In conclusion, and looking to the future, we must build on the successes of the past 20 years and strengthen our commitment to making the protection of civilians a priority of the Security Council.

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

Mr. Kayinamura (Rwanda): I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Indonesia's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and to thank you for organizing this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also want to thank the Secretary-General and the other briefers for their very informative briefings this morning. As a top troop- and police-contributing country (TCC/PCC), Rwanda considers this topic to be critically important to our collective effort to support the implementation of the Security Council's mandates on the protection of civilians. I assure you, Mr. President, of our delegation's full commitment to this important topic.

Today's open debate comes at a significant time, as we mark the twentieth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians in armed conflict as an item on the Security Council's agenda. The protection of civilians remains an important element in the Council's mandates and is included in the mandates of eight of 14 peacekeeping missions. This is therefore a fitting moment for us to reflect on and recommit to the protection of civilian children, women and men in every conflict. As the Secretary-General's 2018 report on this subject (S/2018/462) states, in the absence of any possibility of preventing armed conflict, strengthening the protection of civilians becomes an imperative. Saving the lives of innocent civilians should be a primary obligation of the peacekeeping missions that have protection-of-civilian mandates.

While we are also marking the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, we must

reckon with the fact that they have not been able to provide the desired protection to civilians in armed conflict, as armed groups have consistently violated the Conventions and their Protocols Additional. In that context, the role that troops and police have in enhancing the physical protection of civilian populations, while also contributing to a secure environment conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance and to ensuring political settlements, has become of central importance for all peacekeeping missions.

In May 2015, exactly seven years ago, the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians were adopted by a group of Member States, including several TCCs and PCCs. The Principles are practical and specific guidelines for all peacekeeping stakeholders on the effective and efficient delivery of the protection of civilians. They specifically address the performance, accountability and capabilities required for the effective protection of civilians. Having said that, we acknowledge that the primary responsibility for protecting civilians lies with host nations. However, we cannot close our eyes to the limited capabilities of nations hosting United Nations peacekeeping missions. The role of United Nations peacekeeping in the protection of civilians should therefore aim to bridge the capability gap in the effective protection of civilians, while building the capacity of host countries and facilitating solutions to conflicts.

Peacekeeping's ability to deliver the protection of civilians effectively calls for clear mandates. The protection of civilians in all peacekeeping missions is also greatly influenced by the quality of missions' command and leadership as well as of their training and appropriate equipment. Between 2013 and 2018, more peacekeepers were killed in acts of armed violence than in any other period in the past 70 years of the United Nations. That fact vividly reflects the threats that peacekeepers are facing today. It also suggests the importance of well-designed training, equipment and sophisticated situational-awareness mechanisms that are tailored to specific mission challenges and threats.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of women at all levels of peacekeeping. The evidence shows that having women in meaningful roles increases the effectiveness of peacekeeping and improves missions' ability to protect civilians. Rwanda is proud to be a top contributor of female police to peacekeeping missions. Recruiting women in peacekeeping helps to reduce the chances of conflict and of confrontations in

communities. It provides a greater sense of security to local populations, including women and children. In that regard, we are giving practical support to the ambition of the United Nations to increase the percentage of deployed female peacekeepers.

In conclusion, we believe that we now fully appreciate the central role and value of peacekeeping missions with protection-of-civilians mandates. We know what is at stake when we fall short of our expectations and responsibilities and what it will take to make peacekeeping effective now and in the future.

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

Mr. Kickert (Austria): I would like to thank Indonesia for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the protection of civilians agenda.

Austria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians and the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union. In my national capacity, I would like, in all brevity, to highlight three points.

First, I would like to make the important connection between the twentieth anniversary of the protection of civilians agenda this year and the twentieth anniversary of the women and peace and security agenda next year. Both of these issues highlight the crucial importance of placing human security at the centre of our collective actions. Only by identifying and addressing actions that endanger the security of every individual, as well as involving all of society, can we take steps towards sustainable peace. Among many worrisome current trends, we continue to see unlawful attacks and threat of attacks against educational institutions. Austria is a proud supporter of the Safe Schools Declaration, and we will participate in the third International Conference on Safe Schools. We hope that, on that occasion, we will be able to welcome many more States as supporters of the Declaration.

Secondly, as in previous years, we thank the Secretary-General for his excellent report (S/2019/373). We note with particular concern that the report continues to highlight the grave consequences of urban warfare, including from the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. For that reason, Austria will host an international conference on protecting civilians in

urban warfare, which will take place on 1 and 2 October in Vienna. We look forward to broad participation at the conference and hope that it will contribute to raising awareness and strengthening the debate centred on finding concrete solutions. We will also host a side event on the margins of today's open debate tomorrow, Friday, 24 May, on protecting civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which will take place in Conference Room D.

Thirdly, as the protection of civilians has become an integral part of many United Nations peacekeeping missions, we need to make sure that peacekeepers are well-prepared to fulfil their protection of civilians mandates, including through adequate training to implement those mandates. In that light, Austria offers two United Nations-certified courses annually aimed at creating better awareness of the protection of civilians at the operational level. The recent renewal of the certification of those courses for another four years serves to underline their continuous importance and high quality.

Lastly, let me repeat our call for full compliance with international humanitarian law. Austria continues to be a strong supporter of strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law. In that regard, we remain steadfast in our support for the International Criminal Court as a central means of combating impunity for atrocity crimes.

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

Mr. Srivihok (Thailand): Thailand aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the statement to be delivered by the representative of Viet Nam later this evening on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Let me also offer our thanks to Indonesia for the comprehensive concept note prepared for this open debate (S/2019/385, annex). We also thank the Secretary-General for his substantive report released on 7 May (S/2019/373) and his perceptive briefing today. Allow me to highlight a few elements drawn from our own experience that we feel are also relevant to the discussion today.

First, it is essential to build and sustain a protective environment for civilians and to reduce threats to sustainable peace and development. The

most effective way to protect civilians is through a long-term process and a comprehensive approach that covers the periods before, during and after a conflict. In our view, the concept of sustaining peace urges us to view peacebuilding more holistically, as part of a peace continuum that spans from conflict prevention and resolution to laying the foundation for sustainable peace and development.

Secondly, stronger partnerships are key to strengthening protection of civilian mandates. Member States and the United Nations must work closely to ensure that all principles and elements related to the protection of civilians are implemented by all those involved in such missions. We also have to explore innovative practical tools and approaches to enhance the implementation of protection mandates. This requires an integrated approach among military, police and civilian components, in coordination with national authorities, local communities and relevant humanitarian organizations.

Thirdly, the issue of training is an area that Thailand has always viewed with a discerning eye. All peacekeepers have to be properly prepared, trained and equipped to meet the challenges they will face in the field. It must be underlined time and again that intensive predeployment and periodic in-mission training, both on operational tasks and other protection-related elements, is vital. As an active troop- and police-contributing country, Thai peacekeepers are trained as a standard procedure to assist the local population in their efforts to prevent the relapse of armed conflict and ensure sustainable development. Thailand continues to support the delivery of consistent and coherent training, in collaboration with relevant agencies, for all mandated tasks, to our peacekeeping personnel. Those elements include international law, gender-based issues, the protection of civilians, child protection, conflict-related sexual violence and cultural sensitivity.

We recently endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. We also have our sights set on becoming a regional centre of excellence on the issue of children and armed conflict, and have been working closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. There is more we can and want to do.

But allow me to conclude with a parting thought: in Thailand's view, durable peace is not tenable if civilians

lack security and are not safe. We need to continue to evolve our discussions on enhancing and reinvigorating the protection of civilians agenda in order to meet the new challenges of protecting civilians.

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

Mr. Motufaga (Fiji): First, let me thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council on the important topic of protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations states that:

“We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person ...”

Therefore people, and the protection of people all over the world, irrespective of creed, ethnicity or affiliation, are at the heart of the United Nations and of the Council.

A ceremony was held in the General Assembly Hall last month to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, which is a stark and painful reminder of the failure to protect civilians in armed conflict. This year, as mentioned by previous speakers, it will be 20 years since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1265 (1999), which placed the protection of civilians in armed conflict on the Council’s agenda. However, statistics show that civilians continue to be hugely and disproportionately as victims of conflicts. That was also reflected in the Secretary-General’s report (S/2019/373).

As we meet today in this Chamber, thousands and thousands of civilians around the world are suffering as a result of conflicts. They have suffered directly from deliberate and indiscriminate attacks, loss of livelihoods, being forced to flee their homes and sexual abuse, and they have been denied access to humanitarian aid and proper medical care. In some cases, these acts have done by those who are also responsible for their protection.

Fiji supports the Secretary-General’s efforts to reform and strengthen the Security Council and the peacebuilding architecture through peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The United Nations and its Security

Council remain the most uniquely placed multilateral entities for resolving conflicts and building and sustaining peace in this integrated world. We need to remind ourselves of the enormous responsibility that the Charter of the United Nations places on the Council to maintain international peace and security.

The Council has the platform to minimize the effect of conflicts, end impunity and ensure accountability for genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law and related conventions. The past 70 years have shown that, when the Council agrees, the chances of conflicts occurring are reduced and thousands of lives are saved. But when the Council fails to agree, conflicts are prolonged and civilians ultimately become the victims.

Respect for international conventions, awareness and accountability should be the foundation for protecting civilians in armed conflicts. Member States and others should be constantly made aware of their obligations under international conventions. Member States should always respect their obligations under international conventions relating to the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Ultimately, Member States are responsible for protecting their civilian populations, irrespective of affiliation, ethnicity and creed. The Council and the international community should compel Member States, groups and individuals to be accountable for their actions. We must send a message that violations of these international conventions will not be condoned.

We urge the Council to use all tools at its disposal to protect civilians in armed conflicts. In the past, the United Nations and the Council have established mechanisms to address violations in the form of tribunals, sanctions, embargoes, commissions of inquiry and investigations. The Council should not be selective in its actions. All major violations of international conventions relating to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts should be addressed equally by the Council. The Council’s response should equally fit the act. If no drastic action is taken, civilians will continue to be victims of conflict at a disproportionate level.

Fiji welcomes the United Nations Action for Peacekeeping initiative, which aims to strengthen the role of peacekeepers in protecting civilians in armed conflicts. Peacekeepers are being asked to do more and more. To address this huge challenge, high

performance and standards, inter alia, are expected from peacekeepers.

United Nations peacekeepers protect United Nations and international staff involved in development and humanitarian work. They keep armed groups away from communities. They operate in communities, giving them comfort and protection. They protect humanitarian missions and allow medicine, food and warmth to reach communities and families, especially women and girls. Crucially, peacekeeping is about the soft skills that men and women bring to United Nations missions. These soft skills are about the ability to understand cultures and values; the ability to see how women and children become extraordinarily disadvantaged in conflict; and the ability to interpret signs of individual and group stress early on.

When the United Nations does peacekeeping well, we save lives. When we do peacekeeping poorly, civilian lives are lost. Better performance and standards by peacekeepers mean better protection of civilians.

Fiji would like to thank and pay tribute to all those peacekeepers and others involved in all areas of protecting civilians in armed conflicts around the world.

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

Mr. De la Fuente Ramirez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Indonesia for convening this debate on a fundamental issue for the Security Council. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/373).

Twenty years after the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), commendable progress has been made in relation to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. But it is clear, as we have heard throughout this debate, that such progress is insufficient and this issue deserves a rigorous review. Unfortunately, civilians are the main victims and continue to be the targets of indiscriminate attacks that are clear violations of international and humanitarian law. In situations where we see an increase in the number of civilians being killed or injured, it is natural that the number of refugees and asylum-seekers due to armed conflict also increases.

Moreover, restrictions on access to humanitarian assistance are still all too frequent. We consider this unacceptable. All parties to conflicts must adopt measures to ensure the uninterrupted, safe and timely

access delivery of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian assistance cannot be held hostage to political considerations. We condemn any attack on medical and humanitarian personnel. Such attacks constitute a war crime and for that reason, together with over 30 countries, we signed the French-led declaration on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflict.

We are also concerned that examples of accountability in this area, as provided in international criminal law, have been few and far between. Reports of serious crimes must be investigated and addressed. In this regard, the work of the International Criminal Court is critical to combatting impunity, but the Court needs the support and cooperation of Member States to fulfil its mandate.

The impact of conflict on the availability of food is also cause for alarm. The practice of starving civilians continues to be used as a method of war. Armed conflicts have also had a grave impact on the environment and cultural heritage. Finally, we must emphasize that people with disabilities continue to be disproportionately affected in armed conflicts. We agree with the Secretary-General that it is necessary to pay particular attention to this vulnerable group, and we also support the Action for Peacekeeping initiative to protect civilian personnel participating in peace operations.

The problem of arms flows to conflict zones requires our urgent attention. As a State party to the Arms Trade Treaty, Mexico reaffirms our binding obligation to conduct only responsible transfers of arms. The export of arms to places where they are used to commit violations of human rights or international humanitarian law must be prevented. We urge weapons exporters and those who import those weapons to consolidate this norm and become States parties to the Treaty. I must also recall that the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have recognized the urgent need to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. At the regional conference on the matter held in Santiago, Chile, last December, we adopted a clear political position in this regard.

The Security Council has a fundamental role to play in the protection of civilians in armed conflicts throughout the world. However, the Council's repeated paralysis due to use of the veto has prevented it from acting in the face of crises involving atrocity crimes such

as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is therefore inadmissible for a procedural tool to prevent the Council from fulfilling its obligations, especially when the lives of individuals and even entire peoples are at stake. In keeping with the spirit of our times, greater accountability is necessary. We must fully assume the responsibility that attends the veto and the costs generated by any paralysis of the Council.

We will continue to insist on the need for all States Members of the United Nations, and in particular the permanent members of the Council, to join the Franco-Mexican initiative on restraint in the use of the veto in the event of mass atrocities. This project is already supported by over 100 States and we hope that many more will soon be joining us.

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

Mrs. Imnadze (Georgia): At the outset, let me express our sincere gratitude to the Indonesian presidency for convening today's open debate.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union. Let me add a few remarks in my national capacity.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's first open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV.4046) and adopted the landmark resolution 1265 (1999). Yet, 20 years later, civilian populations continue to fall victim to the devastating impact of armed conflicts, which include attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, hospitals and schools, as well as sexual and gender-based violence. Especially vulnerable are women, children, refugees and internally displaced persons.

While we recognize the action taken by the United Nations over the past 20 years, we believe that more remains to be done to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, in line with the recommendations provided in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/373). Allow me to briefly outline our national efforts.

First, let me highlight the recent decision of the Government of Georgia to endorse the French-led declaration on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflict. This is particularly important in view of the more than 700 attacks against medical facilities and workers that took place in 2018,

as recorded by the World Health Organization. Our Government attaches utmost importance to ensuring accountability, particularly when it comes to war crimes. Georgia therefore fully cooperates with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and facilitated the opening of the ICC office in Georgia in order to conduct investigations into the crimes committed during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. However, the non-cooperation and refusal to allow access to the occupied regions by the occupying Power further hinders progress to address the question of impunity.

The four 1949 Geneva Conventions are part of Georgian legislation. Georgia's Inter-Agency Commission of International Humanitarian Law — a standing governmental body — leads efforts and coordinates the work of relevant entities aimed at ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. Among the Commission's main priorities is the implementation of international humanitarian law programmes and educational activities, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Most of the educational training programmes provided to Georgian military personnel incorporate special courses on international humanitarian law, including the key aspects of strengthening the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Importantly, the ICRC provides assistance to Georgia in locating the whereabouts of missing persons, as well as in identifying and handing over human remains to their families. Since 2013, with the help of the Committee, the human remains of nearly 200 people have been identified and handed over to their families.

Following Russia's full-scale military aggression in August 2008, we have been continuously prevented from extending protection to the population residing in Georgia's occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, which are deprived of minimal safeguards for their safety and are stripped of their fundamental rights and freedoms. The loss of life among Georgian internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the other side of the occupation line is one of the most alarming developments in recent years and, unfortunately, this year is no exception. Recently, a Georgian IDP named Irakli Kvaratskhelia died in custody at the illegally stationed Russian military base in the occupied Abkhazia region after having been unlawfully detained.

Taking into account the effective control of the Russian Federation over the two Georgian regions, it is particularly necessary that international organizations

be firm and vocal on Russia's responsibility in terms of both human rights violations and of the denial of access to international human rights mechanisms on the ground.

Last but not least, over 10 per cent of Georgia's population who have been expelled from the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali as a result of ethnic cleansing continue to be deprived of their fundamental right to return to their homes in safety and dignity. They require firm and lasting international support to exercise their rights.

We reiterate our full support to the Secretary-General in his endeavour to mobilize the United Nations and its Member States to strengthen the protection of human rights of civilian populations in armed conflicts. We also call for the implementation of his recommendations to this end. Georgia stands ready to contribute to these efforts.

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

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): Liechtenstein associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians.

The year 2019 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's protection of civilians in armed conflict agenda. This year also marks the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which are the cornerstone of contemporary international humanitarian law. This crucial body of law is the primary framework to regulate situations of armed conflict, designed first and foremost to protect civilians.

In his report (S/2019/373), the Secretary-General underscores the importance of enhancing and ensuring compliance with the law and accountability for violations with respect to the protection of civilians. A key responsibility for ensuring such compliance rests with the Security Council. It has several tools at its disposal, ranging from support for national efforts to ensuring accountability through to referrals to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Council's overall record, however, is unfortunately mixed at best.

The people of Syria, for example, have been at the receiving end of the failure of the Council to act, several times due to a veto cast by one or more permanent members of the Council. This failure to act prompted the General Assembly to play a more active role in the

area of accountability by creating the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. This decision was a major step forward in ensuring that violations of international humanitarian law in Syria would not go unpunished and also a landmark decision for the accountability work of the United Nations. We look forward to the financing of the Mechanism from the regular budget of the United Nations later this year.

The Council's work in this area must be forward-looking, as well as comprehensive and consistent in its implementation of initiatives that can help to protect civilians trapped in conflict situations. One such initiative is the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes put forward by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group and currently supported by 119 States, including two-thirds of the current Security Council members. The code of conduct is a political commitment to taking timely and decisive action aimed at preventing or ending atrocity crimes and not to vote against credible draft resolutions put forward to this end. It foresees a very important role for the Secretary-General in submitting relevant information to the Security Council and is thus complementary to and reinforces the Secretary-General's prevention agenda.

The most effective way to protect civilians is to avoid armed conflict in the first place, and indeed the goal to prevent armed conflict was the driving idea behind the creation of the United Nations. Preventive diplomacy, mediation and other tools can play a key role in this respect, but the Charter of the United Nations also makes it clear that armed conflict is, in fact, illegal except in narrowly defined, exceptional cases.

We view the criminalization of illegal war-making as an essential part of the conflict prevention agenda. The activation of the jurisdiction of the ICC over the crime of aggression on 17 July 2018 was therefore an important step forward. We encourage all States to ratify the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute on the crime of aggression and we remind Council members that the possibility of referring aggression situations to the ICC is a powerful new deterrent at its disposal.

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

Mrs. Zappia (Italy): I would like to thank the Indonesian presidency for organizing this annual open debate and all the briefers for their important presentations.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union and with that delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

As we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions, it is essential to reaffirm the importance of international humanitarian law and to strengthen our efforts to guarantee its respect, implementation and promotion. The role of non-State actors in armed conflicts, the new tactics of warfare, the absence of clear battlefields and the increasing number of parties to conflicts are posing new threats to international humanitarian law, the principle of humanity and the dignity of every human being in a situation of conflict, especially the most vulnerable. We must reaffirm in the most urgent terms the need to ensure the protection of civilians under all circumstances and in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

Italy is firmly committed to protecting and promoting international humanitarian law and to implementing the principle of accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in situations of armed conflict. My country attaches particular importance to the protection of the most vulnerable categories among civilians.

With regard to children, we strongly condemn all attacks against schools, as well as any military use of educational facilities, in accordance with the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, which we hope will be subscribed to by a growing number of Member States.

As it relates to persons with disabilities, we call for the full implementation of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

With regard to women, as we stated during the important recent Council debate on sexual violence in conflict (see S/PV.8514), we strongly condemn the fact that sexual and gender-based violence continues to

be widely employed as a tactic of war, and we support a gender-oriented approach to emergency situations and to the protection of civilians, recalling our strong commitment to the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, all the relevant United Nations acquis on this subject, as well as the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's most recent report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2019/280).

United Nations peace operations are still a very powerful instrument at the disposal of the international community in the pursuit of sustainable peace and the fulfilment of its responsibility to protect civilians. Therefore, peacekeepers should be trained and equipped to fully implement their protection of civilians mandate. We should enhance our efforts and fulfil the commitments we have undertaken in the framework of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, which provide a comprehensive and whole-of-mission approach to the protection of civilians.

Furthermore, we welcome the recommendations formulated by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2019/373), and in particular his call to develop national policy frameworks for the protection of civilians; step up advocacy efforts to ensure their protection; promote stronger accountability, which in our view must also be achieved through targeted measures; establish or renew fact-finding bodies and commissions of inquiry; and promote the use of referrals to the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, as we look back and reflect on 20 years of the protection of civilians, we must, on the one hand, build on what has been already achieved since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) in terms of the implementation of all resolutions and international norms adopted thus far. On the other hand, we have to look ahead in order to keep the protection of civilians high on the agenda as a cornerstone of the Council's activity and a fundamental duty and responsibility of the international community as a whole.

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

Mr. Bessedik (Algeria): At the outset, I would like to thank Mrs. Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict — a subject of enormous importance that is a matter of high priority and concern

for my country, Algeria. I would also like to thank in particular the Permanent Representative of Indonesia for his concept note (S/2019/385, annex). We fully share his views on the priority areas he identified.

Algeria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Let me be clear — humanitarian law is a sensitive issue and no compromise can be tolerated. It must be respected in all circumstances so as to ensure the survival of the values of humanity and, very often, simply to protect human lives, which is an obligation, not an option.

The changing nature of contemporary armed conflict and of the means and methods of warfare highlights the constantly shifting challenges that civilian populations are facing around the globe. That change raises multiple questions regarding the applicability of international humanitarian law and its efficiency as we celebrate this year the seventieth anniversary of the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, the Geneva Conventions, and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), relating to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Despite the efforts made during the past two decades to protect civilians in armed conflict through the strengthening of peacekeeping mandates and their implementation, and the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation process, following the issuance of the Secretary-General's first report on the issue (S/1999/957), the situation with regard to the protection of civilians has, unfortunately, not changed. At that time much remained to be done, and the report cited the displacement of civilians and refugees, serious human rights abuses, the use of sexual violence and starvation of populations as a weapon of war, the recruitment of child soldiers, the proliferation of small arms, cross-border movements, the difficulty of delivering emergency humanitarian aid and attacks against humanitarian personnel — all of which are still characteristics of the many conflicts that are shaking the planet.

The protection of civilians must be the core of any mediation and conflict resolution effort, and mediators must attach special importance to that aspect. In that regard, I would like to share with the Council our vision of the way forward and, in particular, how the Security

Council and the United Nations and its Member States could act.

First, there is an imperative need to establish a comprehensive, coherent and concrete approach to the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Second, we need to adopt an inclusive strategy that attacks the root causes of conflict and ensures the long-term protection of civilians.

Third, we must strengthen the international and domestic legal frameworks in post-conflict settings. States must, *inter alia*, adopt legislation that punishes the most serious violations of the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional.

Fourth, the protection of civilians has to obey the principles of universality and non-selectivity. In that regard, we deplore the fact that, in many situations, the international community is doing little or nothing, especially with regard to populations under foreign or colonial occupation.

Fifth, no one is above the law. To that end, it is important to prevent all violations defined as such in the various legal instruments.

Sixth, more needs to be done to ensure that humanitarian personnel have access to the most vulnerable and that they be treated with respect and dignity. Action should be taken against humanitarian personnel who violate the principles of humanitarian action.

Seventh, it is important to ensure more effective coordination between the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and to further involve regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union, which has made great progress in that regard.

Eighth, the Security Council should consider the systematic inclusion of the monitoring of human rights in all peacekeeping mandates so that violations of human rights and humanitarian rights are reported and necessary measures can be taken. This meeting must be seen as a reaffirmation of our collective commitment to protecting civilians in situations of conflict and be the first step towards a transition to a policy of non-indifference.

Lastly, when all States and all parties engaged in armed conflict respect international humanitarian law, it will be easier to create a more humane world.

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

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I thank the Indonesia presidency for focusing the spotlight on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

On the twentieth anniversary of the protection of civilians agenda, civilians continue to make up the majority of casualties in conflict, and this issue remains as critical as ever. My delegation supports the Secretary-General's call for urgent and concrete progress on three actions, as reflected in his previous report (see S/2018/462), and would like to make the following observations.

First, strengthening the protection of civilians demands that international humanitarian law be respected and strictly complied with. The United Nations, the Council, Member States and other stakeholders should actively advocate enhancing respect for international humanitarian law by all parties, including non-State actors. All serious violations of international humanitarian law must be investigated and perpetrators must be brought to justice.

Secondly, we need to address the special needs of each of the disproportionately affected vulnerable groups: women, children, internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities. Victims of the indirect effects of armed conflict, such as disease and famine, also need special medical care and specialized services. Therefore, functioning medical facilities and ensuring access to humanitarian aid are critical to the protection of the civil population. Hence, Kazakhstan co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016) and signed the French-led declaration of October 2017 on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in conflict.

Thirdly, the protection of civilians is primarily a responsibility of the host country. To that end, Member States need to develop national policy frameworks, which should include capacity-building, strengthening the rule of law, comprehensive security sector reforms and good governance, as well as the adoption of legislation that regulates the export of arms. Kazakhstan acceded to the Arms Trade Treaty in December 2017 and calls on others to do the same

Fourthly, the protection of civilians mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations should be enhanced through a clearly formulated and practical, whole-of-system approach with close cooperation

among all components and by forging relationships with local populations. Mandates to protect civilians need to be linked to a comprehensive political strategy for durable and sustained peace. We must also actively use innovative practical tools, including unarmed civilian protection.

Many precious lives of civilians, peacekeepers and other United Nations and humanitarian personnel can be saved by introducing new technologies to upgrade our force capabilities. In that regard, next week in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan will host the fifth International Partnership for Technology in Peacekeeping Symposium, which is a platform for capacity-building and improving the effectiveness of peace operations.

Finally, as the Secretary-General has prioritized, the international community should focus on preventive measures, including through overcoming the root causes and promoting peacebuilding and economic development. Kazakhstan is committed to promoting regional stability by using a three-pronged strategy to resolve conflicts, namely, strengthening the security-development nexus and utilizing a revamped regional approach and the One United Nations initiative to ensure greater efficiency, transparency and accountability.

In conclusion, my delegation stands ready to work with the United Nations on the security of civilians and upholding international law.

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

Mrs. Furman (Israel): I would like to congratulate both the Security Council and the Secretary-General on the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the protection of-civilians in armed conflict agenda by the Council.

As a nation whose civilians have faced decades of threats from hostile forces, Israel supports this critical issue. If we seek to protect civilians, we must identify, target and act swiftly against those who choose civilians as their primary targets — namely, terrorists. Terrorism, by definition, refers to the deliberate targeting of civilians through violent means. Its purpose is to kill — for ideological, political or religious reasons — and innocent people pay the price.

Israeli civilians understand that price. For 12 years, since 2007, Hamas has fired over 15,000 rockets and mortars into Israeli towns. That is at least 1,000 rockets and mortars per year, launched from civilian areas into

civilian areas. Rockets, sirens, screams and running for shelter are, tragically, common occurrences for Israelis. Just two weeks ago, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad fired 700 rockets and mortars into Israel over the span of just two days. The rockets hit Israeli homes, hospitals, schools and kindergartens in towns and major civilian population centres, including Ashkelon, Ashdod and Beit Shemesh. Israel's Iron Dome air defence system intercepted tens of rockets successfully, saving countless lives, but some of the rockets managed to hit civilian areas. Four Israeli civilians were killed in those acts of terror, and more than 100 others were injured.

Hamas exploits the people of Gaza, its own Palestinian brothers and sisters, as human shields — an activity that is both illegal and deplorable. By blatantly targeting Israeli civilians and hiding and operating from within the Palestinian population, those Palestinian terrorist organizations are committing a double war crime.

In Lebanon, Hizbullah has transformed southern Lebanon's Shiite villages into terror outposts with the goal of harming Israel. Rocket launchers sit by schools and hospitals, and civilian homes store missiles. Hizbullah has recruited a third of the civilian population within those villages, strengthening its terror network. By launching attacks on Israel from Lebanese population centres, Hizbullah, like Hamas, is committing a double war crime.

As the Secretary-General states in his report (S/2019/373), the vast proliferation of non-State armed groups has contributed to the increasingly asymmetric nature of conflict. To those groups, international law does not exist and civilians are to be exploited as human shields in their efforts to harm civilians. For countries like Israel that seek to protect their citizens, the result is a never-ending battle against terrorists with little or no respect for life.

To make real change is to acknowledge the real problem and act. Our words are meaningless if they are not followed up by clear condemnations of terrorist organizations. If we are here to protect civilians, the Security Council should designate Hamas, Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad as terrorist organizations, a designation that is long overdue.

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

Ms. Núñez Rivas (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation joins others in congratulating Indonesia for organizing this timely open debate.

Uruguay aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

The celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians as a specific item on the Council's agenda and the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions is, as has already been said, a timely moment to reflect on how far we have come. In hindsight, this protection has made significant progress, but despite that observation, there is a chasm between what has been achieved and the real situation that civilians on the ground continue to endure. The discouraging data contained in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/373) irrefutably demonstrate that, and indicate that we are facing enormous challenges. We must therefore take advantage of this opportunity to strengthen our collective determination to move forward with the effective implementation of this agenda.

Among the actions needed to be taken is reducing the proliferation of weapons and the use of explosives in densely populated areas, which cause civilian fatalities and injuries and impact critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools. Uruguay believes that, in addition to global initiatives, it is imperative to encourage regional ones. In that regard, I would highlight the regional meeting on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to discuss the protection of civilians, held in Chile in December 2018.

The Secretary-General's report points out that, in 2018, armed attacks continued to be carried on hospitals and medical personnel, which urgently calls for the implementation of the Geneva Conventions and resolution 2286 (2016), on health care in armed conflicts. Accordingly, Uruguay supports the recommendations made by the Secretary-General concerning its implementation. Attacks on and the military use of schools should also be condemned. My country is a party to the Safe Schools Declaration, which was developed through State consultations led by Norway and Argentina and will hold its third international conference in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, next week. Uruguay will be pleased to participate.

Furthermore, my delegation believes that investigations into crimes perpetrated against civilians

and ensuring accountability play a key role in deterrence and ending the culture of impunity. Member States must therefore adopt and implement national legislation to bring perpetrators to justice. In particular, Uruguay has fully integrated the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court into its domestic legislation. We are also of the view that the Security Council must assume its responsibility to ensure accountability and implement the instruments at its disposal, such as sanctions regimes and its authority to refer cases to the International Criminal Court.

My delegation believes that, in order to reduce the vulnerability of civilians, all actors must share good practices that have been applied successfully in order to reproduce positive results in other contexts and develop strategies that strengthen the effective protection of the population. As a troop-contributing country, Uruguay has valuable experience in that area to share in the framework of peace operations. In that regard, my country reaffirms its commitment to the undertaking and to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

For Uruguay, the protection of civilians by peace contingents has multiple dimensions and must be subject to constant review and improvement to enable them to adapt to developing situations in time. In that regard, several days ago, Uruguay co-hosted a workshop with Australia and Senegal, together with the organization Nonviolent Peaceforce, in which authorities from the Secretariat and experts from various delegations participated in order to analyse non-armed strategies that could be highly beneficial in providing security to defenceless populations.

Given our experience on the ground, we are able to say with confidence that the ability of the Blue Helmets to carry out protection activities depends largely on their ability to forge bonds of trust and communicate with the local population. In that regard, our contingent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo carries out community support, recreational and sports activities. It also provides ongoing support for orphanages and other charitable associations, and organizes videoconferences between primary schools of the Congo and Uruguay, in which children in the same grade and their teachers communicate and exchange teaching experiences, thereby fostering respect for diversity and familiarity with diverse experiences and cultures.

In order to improve the professionalization of the protection of civilians, predeployment training is provided by the National Peace Operations Training Institute of Uruguay in the areas of both human rights and the gender perspective, as well as areas specific to the military, while always emphasizing the welfare of the civilian population and encouraging the inclusion of women troops.

As always, it is worth noting that if sufficient financial resources are not provided for the overall functioning of peace operations, whatever additional efforts made will not produce the expected results. In that regard, Uruguay expresses its concern about the trend towards budget cuts that has been evident in recent years and its negative environment effects on the fulfilment of mandates, which could lead to gaps in critical mission tasks.

In conclusion, if the past 20 years have been a period of reflection on establishing norms and strengthening the agenda, the next 20 must involve concrete action and effective implementation. There will be no immediate or easy solutions, but we cannot cast our gaze aside indifferently and continue to ignore the suffering of millions of civilians — the innocent victims of the scourge of war. Only the political will and the joint work of all actors and the implementation of traditional, as well as innovative, strategies, will make it possible to achieve peaceful coexistence in which the fundamental values of human dignity are respected.

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

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): It is truly a pleasure, Sir, to see the delegation of your friendly country preside over the work of the Security Council for the month of May. I also thank you for taking the initiative to organize this particularly important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict under the presidency of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, whose presence among us earlier we wholeheartedly commend.

I take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the current status of the protection of civilians, while shedding light on the challenges that the international community must overcome in that regard. I also thank Mr. Peter Mauer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello for their especially important briefings.

This year marks the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions — the cornerstone of international humanitarian law — and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) by the Security Council that introduced the protection of civilians on its agenda. Since then, the protection of civilians has become a key item on the agenda of the Security Council and has contributed to building a culture of awareness-raising on the need to prevent violations, other concerns involving the protection of civilians and how to address them.

Without any doubt, over the past 20 years the initiatives taken by the Council have strengthened the protection of civilians in armed conflict and helped save many lives. Nevertheless, an evaluation of the situation concerning the protection of civilians demonstrates that civilians continue to make up the staggering majority of victims. Twenty years later, the protection of civilians is as pertinent and urgent as it has ever been.

I shall underscore the following points.

First, we reiterate that the protection of civilians is first and foremost incumbent on the States concerned. It must be noted, however, that in periods of conflict the capacities of some States are inadequate or even non-existent. In such cases, the international community shoulders the responsibility of supporting them by strengthening their capacities and providing them with the means necessary to fulfil their obligations.

In that regard, strengthening the rule of law is essential to ensuring the effective implementation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Member States should develop national policies based on good practices and establish specialized agencies working for the protection of civilians. Addressing the problems related to political will and the lack of capacities and resources at the national level and pursuing the strengthening of regional and global initiatives remain imperative.

Secondly, prioritizing the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations, in accordance with their mandates, is well established and even more important now that the relevant policies and guidelines have been developed. The operational approach to the protection of civilians has been made clear, and tools and systems have been developed to make the protection of civilians in peacekeeping contexts more effective, such as through joint protection teams and community-alert networks. The protection of civilians requires adequate

human and funding resources, whether in terms of the number of Blue Helmets deployed, their equipment or training. We also need to be able to manage the expectations of all the parties involved, whether it be local populations, the authorities of the host country or the members of the Security Council.

Thirdly, violence against humanitarian workers, in particular national staff, as well as their detention or abduction, continues to hamper humanitarian operations. In that regard, immediate measures should be taken to facilitate safe, prompt and unhindered access for humanitarian workers to populations in need and to ensure their access to assistance. In that context, refugee populations are extremely vulnerable to violations of their rights. The international community must ensure that all their rights are respected and that the assistance provided to them actually reaches them and is not misappropriated or looted. Registration of the refugee population is essential to upholding their rights, as recognized under international law and in Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In addition, States must fulfil their obligation to fight against impunity and to fully investigate and bring to justice those responsible for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity or grave human rights violations.

Lastly, we believe that it would be desirable to promote a preventive approach in order to assess threats and coordinate actions to prevent any deterioration. The preventive dimension could be developed by strengthening the capacities of the countries concerned, promoting the rule of law, ensuring good governance, entrenching a culture of human rights and establishing early-warning mechanisms to identify potential conflicts and prevent them from becoming overt and deadly confrontations.

In conclusion, Morocco applauds all those who work for the protection of populations in conflict areas and would like to take this opportunity to pay them a heartfelt tribute.

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

Mr. Hawke (New Zealand): As the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373) notes, it is a sad fact that 20 years since the Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), the state of the protection of civilians is tragically similar to that time. Members speaking today will no doubt express their outrage at this state of affairs, yet we continue to see the erosion of respect for

the basic principles of international humanitarian law. As we reach the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), and of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, it is important that we reflect on what is working and what is not.

New Zealand recognizes the importance of monitoring, including of human rights, and calls for the continued inclusion of monitoring within peacekeeping and political mandates. Monitoring is crucial to evidence gathering for two reasons.

The first reason is evidence gathering for accountability. We reiterate our support for domestic mechanisms as the primary method of accountability. But where domestic mechanisms fail or countries are unwilling to investigate, the international community has a responsibility to act. We must be prepared to call out breaches of international humanitarian law by States and non-State actors where we see them. We must be prepared to support international mechanisms such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 in order to reinforce that breaches of international humanitarian law are not without consequence.

The second reason is evidence gathering for improvements. We must collectively grapple with the changing nature of conflicts. Urbanized, asymmetric conflicts pose an increased risk to civilians. That must be factored into the assessments required by the law of armed conflict before engagement. Such assessments must include the means and methods of attack and, notably, must therefore review the choice of weapon to be used in any conflict.

Specifically with regard to that issue, I note that the Secretary-General's report usefully draws attention to the direct and indirect humanitarian harm that can be caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Reflecting on our own strong concern about the need to better protect civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, New Zealand warmly welcomes the initiative taken by the Government of Austria to host a conference in October this year to help chart a way forward on that important topic.

The Secretary-General's report notes the wide range of causes of insecurity that can affect the safety and well-being of civilians. Our international responses

must consider the entire conflict cycle in a holistic way. That includes the provision of humanitarian assistance. We have heard today of the continued and pervasive humanitarian access constraints, which we urge all parties to address. Bureaucracy should never be an impediment to saving lives. To ensure a holistic approach to ending conflict, there is a need for greater focus on the parts of the population that are disproportionately impacted by armed conflict. That necessarily includes women, children and persons with disabilities.

New Zealand also deplores the ongoing attacks and violations being committed against health-care facilities and health-care workers. All parties to conflicts, States or otherwise, must abide by the principles of international humanitarian law and their obligations to protect civilians. We must do better.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Gonzato: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

Let me start by thanking Mrs. Retno Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Peter Mauer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict.

The protection of civilians remains of the utmost concern to the EU and its member States. We welcome the opportunity today to speak on this important topic. We also welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373), along with the practical recommendations therein.

Looking back at the state of protecting civilians over the past 20 years, we can identify a number of achievements. However, it is very clear that fundamental challenges remain. I would like to address a number of areas that are of particular concern to us, and where the EU and its member States have taken steps to advance protection efforts.

First, the recurrent failure of parties to an armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law continues to be one of the most critical challenges for the protection of civilians. That is not merely a catchphrase here in the Council but it impacts the lives of numerous civilians worldwide on a daily basis. Indiscriminate attacks against civilian populations, the recurrence of attacks against medical facilities, schools and humanitarian workers, and the arbitrary denial of humanitarian access to people in need are all unacceptable, yet they are reported on a nearly daily basis. We recognize the challenges associated with the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas and their impact on civilians. We call on all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with the principles and rules of international humanitarian law. Promoting compliance with international humanitarian law and respect for humanitarian principles has always been, and remains, a top priority for the EU and its member States. The EU is also especially supporting efforts to safeguard principled humanitarian assistance with respect to counter-terrorism measures and sanctions.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to hold those who violate it accountable. Civilian victims of unimaginable atrocities need and deserve justice. That rings particularly true as we reflect on the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Within the EU, there has been an increasing number of prosecutions under national jurisdiction against those who commit grave breaches of international humanitarian law. The EU also maintains strong support for international justice and accountability, including the work of the International Criminal Court, and urges all States Members of the United Nations to do the same. Let us bridge the gap between what is being said in the Council and everyday practice.

Secondly, as a leading humanitarian donor, the EU specifically focuses on ensuring that our assistance extends beyond the material needs of persons to the broader issues of personal safety and dignity. Many of the crises of today are indeed crises of protection. That is why over the past five years, the EU has provided more than €1 billion for protection activities.

Forced displacement is one of the most common and severe consequences of armed conflict, causing

multiple humanitarian needs and protection concerns. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are among the most vulnerable and access to persons of concern is a particular challenge, as IDPs often live in direct proximity to armed conflicts. In addition, States often lack the means and laws to protect and help them rebuild their lives and help those left behind. Apart from strengthening the protection of and assistance for the forcibly displaced, increased efforts are needed to prevent and resolve armed conflicts and other forms of violence in order to address the root causes of forced displacement.

Thirdly, as the report of the Secretary-General highlights, persons with disabilities continue to be disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises. The European Union is a key proponent of the rights of people with disabilities. In past years, we have taken a number of measures, including the elaboration of a dedicated guidance document to ensure that the specific needs of persons with disabilities are adequately addressed in EU-funded humanitarian assistance.

Fourthly, sexual and gender-based violence continues to be employed as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture and repression. It is a common and alarming trend across various, otherwise diverse crises. The victims — women and girls, men and boys — are often those already belonging to the most vulnerable groups. We therefore welcome the adoption of resolution 2467 (2019) as a step forward in the fight against conflict-related sexual violence, in particular the strong language on criminal accountability, the role of civil society, as well as a survivor-centred approach. In that regard, the European Union reaffirms the importance of the provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

Between 2017 and 2018, the EU allocated approximately €62 million to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. It is absolutely imperative that a gender perspective be incorporated into protection efforts, including humanitarian action. To that end, the EU remains committed, among other initiatives, to the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. Today a specific conference is taking place on the topic in Oslo. We commend the organizers for drawing attention to that important topic and we hope that the outcomes of the conference will improve the prevention and protection from gender-based violence in emergencies.

The European Union is a leader in the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the rights of the child, including their right to education. In 2019, 10 per cent of EU humanitarian aid will support children with safe and quality education activities. The EU is strongly committed to the protection of schools and education in situations of conflict and welcomes initiatives, such as the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, in that regard.

Finally, we continue to underscore that the protection of civilians must be at the core of peacekeeping mandates, in line with the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. Peacekeepers must protect civilians and be able and prepared to use force when civilians are under threat of physical violence, consistent with clear mandates, while operations must be equipped with the necessary tools in that regard. That includes but is not limited to the necessary equipment, as well as the necessary training.

Peacekeepers also play a critical role in protecting children in armed conflict. Well-trained child protection focal points and their cooperation with civilian child protection advisers are essential to ensuring not only the effective monitoring and reporting of grave violations, but also that children associated with armed forces and groups are treated with special consideration for their status as children. In that context, we would like to emphasize the importance of strengthening the recording of casualties through United Nations operations in order to support evidence-based advocacy with parties to conflict and to identify factors that contribute to civilian casualties.

Additionally, Member States should strive to improve the gender balance in all components of peacekeeping operations in order to achieve a more equitable gender representation and to improve the capacity of missions to reach all segments of the civilian population. We therefore welcome all efforts in that direction, in particular the United Nations system-wide strategy on gender parity and the recently approved Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028.

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

Ms. Bavdaž Kuret (Slovenia): I wish to thank the Indonesian presidency of the Council for convening today's open debate, the Secretary-General for his

annual report (S/2019/373) and briefing, and the briefers for their presentations.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. I wish to add some remarks in my national capacity.

This year, we mark 20 years since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and 70 years since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions. And yet, 70 years later, civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties. Worse yet, the scale and severity of human suffering in armed conflicts worldwide continue to grow at an alarming pace. Today, many parties to conflicts show blatant disregard for the principles governing the conduct of hostilities. Quite the opposite — they deliberately target civilians.

The most affected are the most vulnerable groups: women, children, refugees, internally displaced persons and people with disabilities. New ways and means of armed conflict, such as the proliferation and fragmentation of non-State actors, increasingly urban warfare and the indiscriminate use of explosives, are putting even more civilians at risk of being killed, injured or displaced.

Peacekeeping operations play a central role in protecting civilians and it is essential that the Council provide all peacekeeping missions with mandates in which special emphasis is given to the protection of the most vulnerable.

Slovenia has a history of assisting the victims of armed conflict and it remains committed to alleviating the pain of children affected by armed conflict, including by providing psychological and physical assistance and rehabilitation. In recent years, more than 500 children have been rehabilitated in Slovenia. Social rehabilitation training for pre-school and school counsellors and a mine-risk education programme are just two examples that have proven to be of great importance for strengthening the overall well-being and development of children affected by armed conflicts.

Slovenia also continuously advocates for respect for treaty obligations and customary international law protecting civilians. We fully support the use of preventive diplomacy and call for prevention and a better response to large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. We repeat our call on the Security Council to strongly, systematically, consistently and promptly respond to all violations of

international humanitarian law, including by using restrictive measures against State and non-State actors in breach of international humanitarian law.

Ensuring accountability and fighting impunity, which are key elements in the protection of civilians, remain a major challenge. In that regard, the role of international criminal justice, in particular the International Criminal Court, has been recognized. States must comply with their obligations under international law to hold accountable perpetrators of crimes committed against civilians.

Women have a very important role to play in the protection of civilians, and their involvement is crucial to finding the best ways to lessen the burden of civilians in conflict situations. Exactly a month ago, we called on all parts of the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to continue prioritizing this issue, and further urged the Council to strongly, systematically, consistently and promptly respond to all violations in situations of armed conflicts (see S/PV.8514). Today we again ask the Council to do its utmost to prevent, investigate and, when necessary, take appropriate actions to ensure accountability. We must continue to maintain the safeguarding of humanitarian access and respect for humanitarian principles at the core of our endeavours to protect civilians and provide assistance to them in situations of armed conflict. Impunity for violations of international humanitarian law can no longer be tolerated.

I would like to conclude by stressing that effective peacebuilding and peacekeeping must involve the entire United Nations. Mandates must be robust but still flexible enough to ensure that protecting and assisting civilian populations remain at their core. That demands the Council's strong and continuing engagement.

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

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to commend the Indonesian presidency for its initiative in convening this meeting, which coincides with the seventieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the protection of civilians in conflict and war as well as the twentieth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians on the agenda of the Security Council. We also welcome Her Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and all the other Ministers present here today. We

thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Federico Borello and Mr. Peter Maurer for their valuable briefings.

The acts of violence being perpetrated around the world, and the scourge of war in many of its regions, accompanied by gross violations of international humanitarian law, require concerted international efforts to support the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Over the past 20 years we have witnessed positive developments on the Security Council's agenda in that regard. However, despite such developments, civilians still constitute the vast majority of the victims of armed conflict. Notwithstanding these challenges, Jordan has always been an advocate for peace and an effective mediator in establishing peace and security, not just in our region but all over the world. I would like to briefly mention the three fundamental pillars of Jordan's humanitarian role in providing protection, security and safety for civilians in armed conflicts.

The first pillar is in regard to refugees. The crises and wars that the Middle East continues to endure have had repercussions for our country. In the past few decades we have hosted waves of refugees who found safe haven in Jordan for themselves, their families and children until their voluntary, safe and dignified return to their countries could be assured. The Government has cooperated with international donors to improve the infrastructure of refugee camps by providing roads, crossings, sanitation networks and education, food, medicine and health services, despite the scarcity of resources and economic challenges in Jordan. We have also cooperated with the United Nations in order to bring essential humanitarian assistance to the needy through our borders. We have implemented projects aimed at building the capacities and resilience of local communities hosting Syrian refugees by creating and providing work opportunities for them and for the refugees, with a view to strengthening their resistance to crises. Jordan has also provided a wide range of educational, health and legal services, as well as mechanisms for protecting refugee women, girls and children from physical and sexual violence in the camps, because we fully believe in a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

The second pillar is our active participation in peacekeeping operations. Jordan has been participating in peacekeeping operations under the umbrella of the United Nations all over the world for decades. More than 100,000 male and female Jordanians have participated in peacekeeping operations and have

provided protection to civilians amid difficult and complicated circumstances. For example, Jordan has run a number of field hospitals in Iraq, the West Bank, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Ethiopia and other countries. The Jordanian military field hospital in Gaza has continued to help civilians through the provision of treatment and medical services and has provided services to more than 2.5 million patients since its creation in 2009.

The third pillar is related to combating terrorism and violent extremism. Obscurantist and extremist ideologies have fuelled destructive conflicts all over the world, particularly in the Middle East. Jordan has therefore implemented a number of global initiatives aimed at prevention, with the goal of confronting erroneous ideologies promoted by terrorist groups against the Islamic faith. We have also worked hard to spread a culture of harmony and coexistence in the region and internationally, as well as introducing the youth, peace and security agenda in the Security Council with a view to immunizing and empowering young people. Jordan and New Zealand recently co-chaired a meeting of the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online, with the participation of major global technological and Internet companies, to raise awareness of the threat created by the spread through social media of obscurantist ideologies in societies and countries.

At the same time, we are seeing the ongoing violation of every fundamental human right in the occupied Palestinian territories, accompanied by Israeli violations of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and norms of international humanitarian law. That demands that we take urgent and appropriate steps to ensure the safety, welfare, protection and security of civilians and accountability for all violations, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, I would like to recall the wisdom that says that evil prevails when good people cannot function. If we work together we will be able to achieve something essential — a future of harmony and peace. That is what humankind desires and needs today.

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

Mr. Islam (Bangladesh): We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We thank the Indonesian presidency for organizing this open debate and for the concept note (S/2019/385, annex). We also thank the Secretary-General and our other briefers for highlighting some of the important aspects of the protection of civilians.

In September 1974, the father of our nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in a statement to the General Assembly, said,

“The very struggle of Bangladesh symbolized the universal struggle for peace and justice. It was, therefore, only natural that Bangladesh, from its very inception, should stand firmly by the side of the oppressed people of the world” (*A/PV.2243, para. 5*).

Indeed, in the wake of what our people endured during our liberation war in 1971, we attach great importance to the issue of the protection of civilians during conflicts within the ambit of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and have incorporated a strong and comprehensive protection of civilians component in our peacekeeping training and recruitment guidelines.

The ongoing Rohingya humanitarian crisis once again reveals to us the inability of the international community to stand by a persecuted people when they need them most. Ironically, the height of the crisis coincided with our collective efforts at the United Nations to build consensus around the concept of sustaining peace. On paper, we have been successful in shifting the focus of peacebuilding largely from post-conflict situations to conflict prevention. But on the ground, for the Rohingya people, for example, what difference does it make? In effect, a crisis in recent history, with many signs of escalation and relapse since the 1970s, gave us enough early warning to prevent it. Yet we seriously failed to save a whole ethnic minority community from persecution, which the High Commissioner for Human Rights called a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.

As a peace-loving nation with an unwavering commitment to promoting and sustaining global peace, we are doing everything possible to safely and securely host the Rohingya community fleeing persecution in Rakhine state in our own territory. We are also making sincere efforts to deter and contain the downstream escalation of the crisis to the regional or international level. During her address to the General Assembly at

its seventy-second session (see A/72/PV.14), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the creation of safe zones in Myanmar's Rakhine state for the protection of civilians under the auspices of the United Nations or relevant regional partners. Our Foreign Secretary, in his statement to the Council in February (see S/PV.8477), elaborated further on the idea of safe zones, along with other concrete proposals for the safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return of the Rohingyas and their integration into Myanmar society. We seek the support of the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to take due consideration of those proposals. Such initiatives would also serve as a critical confidence-building measure for the Rohingya to return, which is the only practical and sustainable solution to the crisis.

Our own experiences with the protracted Rohingya crisis have exposed us to various layers of challenges regarding the protection of civilians, particularly when the State concerned is unwilling to discharge its own responsibility to protect all civilians in its territory. Also, as one of the leading troop- and police-contributing countries in the past three decades, we have experienced first-hand the relevance of the protection of civilians mandate as well as its implementation challenges. Against that dual backdrop, we wish to take this opportunity to stress six specific points.

First, States should assume the primary responsibility of identifying fault lines for conflicts, and driving and directing priorities, strategies and activities for conflict prevention and sustaining peace, thereby ensuring the harmonious coexistence of the various religious and ethnic groups concerned, with adequate opportunities for growth and prosperity for all. The United Nations needs to invest more in the field than in Headquarters in order to build capacities to detect early warning signs and work more closely with host Governments and other stakeholders to scale up its upstream prevention activities to match its enhanced role in conflict prevention and sustaining peace, as mandated by the historic twin resolutions (Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262).

Secondly, the United Nations must build its capacity to translate early warnings into early responses through effective measures to prevent the escalation of violence against civilians. In that regard, the Security Council's protection of civilians mandate must be pressed into application in a timely manner. In doing so, it is

critical to put greater emphasis on strategic analysis and assessment of risks, including understanding the core grievances and dehumanizing motives of parties, if any. Accompanying efforts must be made to find local solutions by targeting resilience factors and bridge-builders among stakeholders and developing nationally owned and focused strategies.

Thirdly, in the case of the escalation of violence, we must ensure the unhindered, safe passage of the relevant humanitarian personnel and supplies to minimize civilian casualties and human suffering. We must honour our shared commitment to allow the unfettered access of humanitarian assistance and medical care during times of natural disasters and conflicts.

Fourthly, Member States must respect their disarmament commitments across the board, including those relating to conventional weapons such as landmines and other explosive weapons. The use of such lethal weapons with the capacity to kill indiscriminately in the commission of atrocity crimes against civilians is a serious violation of international humanitarian law, and the State concerned must be held accountable for such use.

Fifthly, Bangladesh has supported the women and peace and security agenda of the United Nations ever since it played a lead role in the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000). We are committed to increasing the number of female peacekeepers in order to achieve the target set by the United Nations. We have received first-hand accounts from Rohingya women fleeing from Myanmar on how rape and other forms of sexual violence can be used against women during conflicts. We are more convinced than ever that women peacekeepers can play a natural role in protecting their fellow women and supporting them physically and mentally to overcome traumatic experiences of sexual violence.

Sixthly, ensuring accountability and justice for serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law is of paramount importance. The international community and the United Nations should make appropriate use of the tools at their disposal to that effect, particularly when it comes to the protection of civilians agenda.

As a major troop- and police-contributing country, Bangladesh has vast experience in tackling protection of civilians challenges in the field. We take a pragmatic approach to the protection of civilians mandate, both in practice and through preparedness. We realize that,

mandated or not, there is an inherent expectation of peacekeepers in the field to protect civilians in danger. Often, those expectations are unrealistic and are not matched by adequate resources. Moreover, the situations on the ground are becoming increasingly hostile and complex. We therefore reiterate that protection of civilians mandates need to be realistic and achievable, and must be backed by viable political strategies and adequate resources. We must also devise contingency plans so that the protection of civilians capabilities in the field are resilient enough to tackle sudden threats, including asymmetrical ones.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1270 (1999), which gave the first explicit mandate to protect civilians to United Nations peacekeeping operations. This milestone year can be used to reflect upon where we stand when it comes to realizing the protection of civilians mandate, with a special focus on the occasions where we could not apply ourselves. Looking at the millions of persecuted civilians around the world, looking at the faces of hapless Rohingya women and children at the world's largest refugee camp, in Cox's Bazar, we must resolve to do something that makes sense for them.

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

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): We are delighted that the Indonesian presidency has convened this debate. As we mark 20 years of the protection of civilians agenda in the Security Council and 70 years since the signing of the Geneva Conventions, my country, Ireland, sincerely welcomes the culture of protection that has been brought to the work of the Security Council. We also welcome the strides that have been made in increasing adherence to and, importantly, respect for international humanitarian law. Drawing from the Indonesian presidency's very useful concept note (S/2019/385, annex), I want to make four brief points.

First, let us recognize the threshold issue — we must listen to the voices of civilians themselves. Enabling and listening to local stakeholders ensures the development of strategies that are actually responsive to local need where they are. Put simply, such strategies stand the greatest chance of success. We welcome the focus of the Secretary General's report (S/2019/373) on the ways in which conflict affects people differently, with specific focus on the protection needs of women, children, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons

and refugees. I am reminded of the powerful words of Ms. Nujeen Mustapha, when she spoke in this Chamber just last month (see S/PV.8515), urging the Council to make “no one left behind” more than a mere slogan. That is our responsibility, both in language and in law. Let us get on with that job.

How do we do that? That brings me to my second point — we must work to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. Importantly, we have to strengthen accountability for all violations. Violations, including attacks by both State and non-State actors on schools, medical facilities and personnel, are utterly unacceptable. The Security Council must step up and step in to play its role in ensuring accountability and referring violations to the International Criminal Court. It must also work to ensure that any referral is accompanied by support for the Court, particularly with respect to the execution of arrest warrants and the critical issue of the provision of adequate financial support.

Thirdly, the humanitarian impact of urban conflict and the effects of explosive weapons in populated areas is increasingly worrying and addressing it is increasingly urgent. We welcome the focus of the Secretary-General has put on this in his Agenda for Disarmament, and we are proud to champion Action 14 of the Agenda. We support the Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas Talks initiative undertaken by Germany last year, and Austria's decision to host a conference on this important topic in October.

Fourthly, with regard to the need to ensure that our peacekeepers are equipped with the necessary skills and capabilities to effectively carry out their mandates, I agree that we have seen great strides in the normative framework for the protection of civilians, but there is a “but”. We consider that challenges remain in its operationalization. Collectively, we have agreed to a range of principles and codes, including the Kigali Principles, but to be very frank, they are meaningless if they are not implemented or delivered on the ground. Mandates must match the realities of conflict on the ground, while training and resources must in turn match mandates. Concretely, in the past six months, Ireland has provided two training sessions on the protection of civilians, bringing together troops from more than a dozen countries. Like your country, Mr. President, Ireland is a peacekeeper nation. As a country with more than 60 years of continuous participation in peacekeeping, we are aware of our responsibility and

willing to play our part. We hope to continue to do so if we are elected to sit at this table for the term from 2021 to 2022.

In conclusion, protecting civilians is a complex task, requiring collaboration across the political, development, humanitarian and civil-society spheres. It demands the involvement of women and men, young and old, and it demands collaboration at the local, national and global levels. In the long term, the best way to protect civilians is of course to address the root causes of conflicts, promote human rights and build sustainable peace. That is the ideal. But until then, the Security Council simply must ensure that parties to armed conflict respect rules that apply even in times of war and seek accountability where they are not respected. We must keep people accountable for their violations. We surely owe that to the countless innocent victims of conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the African Union.

Ms. Mohammed: I would like to start by commending the presidency of Indonesia for convening today's open debate on the very important subject of civilian protection in times of conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his important briefing today, as well as his report on the topic (S/2019/373). and I thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict, for their insightful briefings at the start of today's debate.

The African Union (AU) is fully committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and continues to strengthen its normative and legal frameworks for enhancing such protection. Over the past decade, the AU has responded to many situations in which civilians were caught up in the middle of fighting or directly targeted by the negative forces of terrorist groups. In that regard, it should be recalled that the transformation in 2002 of the Organization of African Unity into the African Union was marked by the transition from a doctrine of non-interference to one of non-indifference to human suffering. As a result, AU peace support operations in Africa have been increasingly tasked with protecting civilians. To a greater or lesser degree, almost all the peace operations authorized by the Peace and Security Council since 2003 have faced protection challenges throughout the course of their deployment

and have used varying strategies to address them. This is in response to the fact that in the context of contemporary conflicts, civilians are victims of atrocities and violations and have become clear targets for attack by armed actors. At least 600,000 African civilians, in 27 countries, have been killed during conflicts in the past 20 years, with millions more wounded and displaced.

In that regard, I want to highlight the experience of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which remains one of the best illustrations of the growing AU commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In the more than a decade since its deployment in 2007, AMISOM has achieved undeniable security and political gains while ensuring the protection of the Somali civilian population from the terrorist threat through its active military operations in the country. AMISOM continues to ensure that its operations are conducted in compliance with the applicable provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In that regard, a series of training and awareness-raising programmes were conducted to familiarize personnel with appropriate measures for protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

The importance of the protection of civilians for the AU is further demonstrated by its zero-tolerance position on sexual exploitation and abuse. In order to maintain it, we have been working very closely with the United Nations to enhance compliance with international instruments in peace support operations, which is in line with the joint African Union-United Nations strategic framework documents, including the 19 April 2017 Joint African Union-United Nations Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, as part of the ongoing efforts to secure predictable and sustainable financing for AU peace support operations.

We recognize that women are still the principal victims of sexual and other forms of violence and discrimination in times of conflict, and that they also remain key partners as leaders at the community, national and regional levels. We therefore have a responsibility for ensuring the protection of women and children in situations where they are threatened or affected by violence, in line with the relevant AU and international instruments. While the necessary instruments for the protection of women and children in conflict and for the promotion of their rights exist,

the pace of their implementation, despite the progress that has been made, remains slow, and we must call on all concerned stakeholders to fully implement them in the promotion of the protection of civilians, particularly in conflict situations.

Before concluding, I would like to share a few lessons learned from the AU's experience in the field. The African Union's experience has highlighted the importance of the protection of civilians for the overall success of peace efforts on the ground. The gaps and challenges confronting today's multidimensional peace support operations go far beyond the protection debate as such. The protection of civilians is central to the purpose and legitimacy of any peace operation. Any failure in properly implementing the protection-of-civilians mandate carries a high risk of turning populations against an international military presence, which is very detrimental, particularly in asymmetrical threat environments. We recognize that peace processes that do not bring a level of security to the civilian population cannot succeed. Successful peace operations must rely on both the local civilian population and external partners to help to build peace and sustain the political momentum behind peace processes.

Finally, our experience has highlighted the need to devise effective systems of information-gathering and analysis that detect patterns of atrocities and develop strategies and operational approaches that would enable militaries to effectively protect civilians from physical violence.

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

Monsignor Grysa: I would like to thank Indonesia for convening today's open debate to consider the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

As other speakers have already noted, this year marks the seventieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions, which together form the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which was adopted in a context precisely where respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law was eroding.

Two decades later, the strong condemnation of the deliberate targeting of civilians and the calls urging all involved in armed conflicts to comply strictly with

international humanitarian law are more relevant and pressing than ever, considering that more and more victims in armed conflicts are innocent civilians. While in the early 1900s civilian fatalities in armed conflict were around 5 per cent, in the 1990s non-combatant fatalities were over 90 per cent. Civilian populations clearly pay the highest price.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373) notes that since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and the other protection-focused resolutions that have followed, the attention and action of the Security Council have strengthened the framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflict and saved countless lives. The same report, however, as well as other sources of information, show us that much remains to be done to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian actors.

As a response to that need, recent peacekeeping mandates have explicitly included the protection of civilians, the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and strict compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. Moreover, increased attention to predeployment formation and context-specific training has improved the operational capacity and performance of the Blue Helmets.

A major part of the problem, although not the entire problem, is that today's conflicts are more drawn out and fragmented. They increasingly also involve the engagement of non-State armed groups, which, more often than not, act either in total ignorance of or in absolute disrespect for humanitarian law and principles. Places where civilians should feel safe are instead targeted; schools come under fire; hospitals, medical staff and patients are attacked; places of worship, which should be havens of peace, become places of death and devastation; systematic attacks against cultural heritage turn into weapons of war; homes are destroyed and entire villages are burned to the ground; women and girls are raped; children are abducted and forced to join armed groups; and in far too many places, whole generations are deprived of education and other basic services, thereby increasing the danger of perpetuating that vicious cycle of violence and underdevelopment.

Protracted crises, the restricted movement of goods and the denial of humanitarian access all have devastating effects on civilian populations. They are ensnared in conflicts not of their choosing, forced to flee their homes and live in camps where they are vulnerable

to diseases and exposed to abuses of all sorts. Even humanitarian workers and volunteers increasingly find themselves targets of direct, intentional attacks, often made possible by the illegal sale and proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

How ironic it is that food and medical supplies are often impeded while guns and ammunition circulate freely. That widespread and growing culture of impunity impedes warring parties from respecting the rules of war. If more robust legal mechanisms and sanctions were put firmly in place, a shift of mentality and culture would be, at least, given a chance to grow and flourish.

As we fail to spare too many from the scourge of war, we must focus our efforts on protecting the most vulnerable, particularly women, children, the elderly and the disabled, as well as on ensuring that all those engaged in armed conflict, State actors and non-State actors alike, must adhere to the principles enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and the provisions of the Council's resolutions. Today's open debate must serve as proof of the Council's commitment to translating resolutions into effective action to better protect civilians in conflict. We owe them that.

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

Mr. Carazo (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica thanks Indonesia for convening this important debate. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Mauer and Mr. Federico Borello for their valuable contributions to this discussion.

Although it has been 20 years since the Security Council adopted resolution 1265 (1999), leading to the inclusion of the issue of the protection of civilians on its agenda and to its being considered a core issue, little has changed in those two decades. To date, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/373), there have been tens of thousands of cases of civilians killed, maimed or injured in conflicts. It is a frustrating situation, which has been expressed today in the Council.

The conflict also has indirect effects, such as forced displacement, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and, consequently, the deprivation of populations of the satisfaction of their most basic needs, such as access to health care and education. Those effects grow exponentially when the conflict spreads to urban areas, which, unfortunately, happens with increasing

frequency. The Secretary-General reports that there are more than 50 million people affected by conflict in urban areas.

Costa Rica reiterates its call on the parties to conflicts to eliminate the use of explosive weapons, particularly those of long range, in cities and densely populated areas. Attacks with such weapons not only result in a high number of victims but also in the large-scale destruction of homes, essential infrastructure and much basic services; forced displacement; refugees; difficulty in gaining humanitarian access; hunger and environmental impact, which all further aggravate the humanitarian situation. That is why Costa Rica joined 22 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in condemning acts that contravene international humanitarian law by adopting the Santiago communiqué in Chile.

Costa Rica also recognizes the crucial role of humanitarian aid in the protection and relief of civilian populations. We condemn the arbitrary denial of relief operations and advocate for the transit of humanitarian aid operations to be guaranteed, both by States and by non-State armed groups.

Attacks on civilians are a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, as are deliberate attacks on medical personnel, medical facilities, places of refuge for the sick and wounded and schools. The perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable, and States must take greater action to eliminate impunity in such cases. In that regard, Costa Rica recognizes the Security Council's efforts to establish ad hoc tribunals and investigative mechanisms, such as that created in the case of the chemical weapons attacks in Syria, and we urge that they be re-established and updated so that, we hope, they will never have to be used again. Early and effective action by the Council, especially preventive actions, is also indispensable. We therefore urge its members to implement the code of conduct promoted by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group and urge those with the right of the veto to refrain from using it in situations involving, *inter alia*, war crimes.

Costa Rica believes that, until greater control has been established over the international arms trade, the situation will continue to deteriorate. Legislation on arms exports must be in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law and must translate into regulations that prevent the

uncontrolled circulation of weapons from continuing to fuel conflicts. We therefore join the Secretary-General in calling on States that have not yet done so to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty as a means of protecting civilians in times of conflict.

We also recognize the importance of accountability, and we therefore attach great importance to the periodic submission of reports on the protection of civilians to the Security Council. In line with the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda, we agree that the recording of data in that regard should be systematic. We therefore recommend the implementation of a common United Nations system for registering civilian casualties.

We agree with the Secretary-General that, in order to guarantee the protection of civilians, the priority must always be to prevent conflict and lay the foundations for building sustainable peace. We believe that national policy frameworks that establish institutional responsibilities in this area must be formulated and that those normative actions should be extended to local and community authorities, so that empowered members of communities have the necessary tools to face the challenges posed by conflicts and young people and women can build local resilience, thereby facilitating reconstruction and peacekeeping processes.

Costa Rica supports the recommendations outlined by the Secretary-General in his report and reiterates the importance of continuing to use the tools provided by the Charter of the United Nations, while remaining vigilant, reporting regularly to the Council and making direct recommendations with regard to protection, but above all preventing attacks and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

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

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): First of all, allow me to express my heartfelt congratulations to you, Mr. President, for presiding over this important meeting of the Security Council. As a fellow member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Myanmar takes pride in the very successful and commendable Indonesian presidency for the month of May.

It is most fitting to hold this open debate marking the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and in the context of the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. We

welcome all the steps taken by the Council to address the challenges pertaining to the protection of civilians.

Armed conflicts have wrought civilian casualties, suffering and insecurity. Armed conflicts leave lasting negative impacts on the political stability, peace and security, rule of law and sustainable economic and social development of a country. Therefore, focusing on conflict prevention and resolution and building sustainable peace are the most fundamental and crucial steps necessary for ending the suffering of innocent civilian populations during armed conflicts. We must promote dialogue and engagement and facilitate the settlement of conflict through political means in good faith.

Myanmar is a country born with internal armed conflicts. We know too well about the cost of armed conflict and the value of peace and stability. Therefore, we place peace at the heart of our democratic nation-building endeavour. Myanmar believes that sustainable peace is the only way to end the plight of all societies affected by armed conflicts. Peace is also essential to sustainable development and the perpetuity of democracy and human rights.

Therefore, the Government has pushed forward a peace process with ethnic armed organizations through the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement and the holding of the Union Peace Conference to end internal armed conflicts. Building a lasting peace requires political will, courage and determination. It cannot be achieved overnight. But peace is the ultimate solution to conflicts and the collateral damage affecting civilian populations.

We recognize that taking preventive measures is the most effective way to protect the most vulnerable people in armed conflicts, especially women and children. In that regard, the Government of Myanmar is actively cooperating with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. The Government established an interministerial committee to implement national action plans to prevent and address conflict-related violations against women and children.

Training workshops have been held in collaboration with the respective Special Representative of the Secretary-General offices and with the United Nations agencies to impart awareness and knowledge among security personnel on violations against women and

children. We are encouraged by the ongoing constructive engagement and cooperation with the two Offices of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General to prevent and eliminate violations against women and children in armed conflict.

My delegation believes that domestic, legal and judicial systems must be the primary recourse for prosecuting human rights violations. In that connection, States need to strengthen their own legal and judicial institutions to establish effective rule of law and promote a safer environment for their citizens. Myanmar has undertaken important legal reforms, particularly revising the child rights law and the law on preventing and protecting against violence against women, so as to be in conformity with international norms and standards. The international community can play an important role by providing necessary legal and technical support to States in their institutional capacity-building efforts.

The Government of Myanmar has adopted a strong policy of not condoning any human rights abuse. In line with that commitment, the Government has established an Independent Commission of Enquiry to investigate all allegations of human rights violations following Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army terrorist attacks in August 2017 in northern Rakhine. The mandate of the Commission is to seek accountability and reconciliation. The Commission is carrying out its mandate with independence, impartiality and objectivity. Anyone found guilty of committing atrocities will be punished according to law. Undue external interference will only be counterproductive and will be detrimental to Myanmar's effort to enforce the rule of law, peace and national reconciliation.

I would like to state in unequivocal terms that Myanmar will never accept any measure that violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, such as the creation of a "safe zone" for Muslim populations inside Myanmar's territory, as proposed by Bangladesh's Prime Minister and just repeated by the representative of Bangladesh a few minutes ago in this Chamber. Bangladesh's incessant attempt to destroy our bilateral efforts to solve the humanitarian problem of Rakhine state and its action to demonize the Government and the people of Myanmar will not contribute to solving the problem in Rakhine state and will only create further polarization and prolong the suffering of the people.

Armed conflicts displace persons, deprive them of their normal livelihood and their basic human rights. Even the very essential humanitarian assistance cannot reach affected populations under circumstances of active hostilities. It is necessary to build trust and understanding among all stakeholders, including the Government, non-State actors and aid providers, to enable humanitarian access to civilian populations in need. It is crucial that the provision of humanitarian assistance be made in accordance with the four humanitarian principles without politicization.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the relevant United Nations agencies, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the relevant non-governmental organizations, particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the relevant civil society organizations for providing humanitarian assistance for the people affected by armed conflict. The role of civil society organizations is also crucial to facilitating agreements. Recently, the Myanmar Government's National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and the Kachin Humanitarian Concern Committee successfully discussed the way forward towards ensuring the return of displaced persons in Kachin state to their homes safely and with dignity, while addressing humanitarian needs and closing internally displaced persons camps centres.

As long as there is armed conflict, there will always be civilian casualties. Silencing the guns and achieving durable peace will ultimately end the suffering of innocent civilians, mainly women and children, who bear the brunt of those predicaments. Myanmar is committed to ending the decades-long internal armed conflict by peaceful means through political dialogue. We are striving to create an enabling political environment to establish a fully functioning democracy by initiating a constitutional amendment process.

The Government and the people of Myanmar have fixed their eyes on the national mission of building a peaceful, prosperous and democratic federal union. Peace and reconciliation will be at the core of that endeavour. We shall not be led astray from our chosen path to peace and democracy under any circumstances or in the face of any form of challenges. We hope that the international community will be able to contribute constructively to achieving peace, development and democracy in Myanmar so that all our people will be free from conflict and live together in peace and harmony, enjoying human rights, justice and equality.

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

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for convening this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

This year marks several important anniversaries in the protection of civilians, namely, the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions — a cornerstone of international humanitarian law — the holding by the Security Council of its first open debate on the topic in February 1999 (see S/PV.3978), with presidential statement S/PRS/1999/6 as its outcome, the subsequent adoption of the first Security Council resolution — resolution 1265 (1999) — on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the authorization, through resolution 1270 (1999), of a United Nations peacekeeping operation with the explicit mandate to protect civilians under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

However, civilians continue to suffer from inadequate protection in situations of armed conflict. A defining feature of most, if not all, conflicts is still the failure of the parties to respect and ensure respect for their obligations to protect civilians. Indeed, as the concept note (S/2019/385, annex) points out, ensuring the implementation of international humanitarian law constitutes the central challenges of today, and should be the key priority of Member States for the years ahead.

Fundamental to enhancing respect for international law is the need to ensure accountability for wrongdoing. It is critical that under no pretext peace efforts encourage, accept or tolerate situations achieved by the unlawful use of force and other egregious violations of general international law, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Azerbaijan supports the increased focus on the problem of forced displacement as a result of armed conflict. There is a need for strengthened effort to prevent, address and resolve the challenges of such displacement, particularly by supporting the return of refugees and internally displaced persons in safety and dignity.

Among the pressing issues requiring urgent action is that of civilians taken hostage and reported missing in connection with armed conflict. We continue our consistent effort to raise awareness of the problem at the international level and further develop rules-based guidance to that effect, including through the

relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women, of which Azerbaijan is a main sponsor.

The issue that we are discussing today is of the utmost importance for the Security Council, the entire international community and my country in particular. The forcible deportation of some 250,000 Azerbaijanis from their homes in Armenia at the end of the 1980s was accompanied by killings, enforced disappearances, the destruction of property and pillaging. At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, full-scale war was unleashed against Azerbaijan, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and caused considerable destruction of civilian infrastructure, property and livelihoods in my country.

A significant part of the territory of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno Karabakh region, the seven adjacent districts and some exclaves, was seized by Armenia and remain under its occupation in violation of international law and resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993). The occupied territories were ethnically cleansed of all Azerbaijanis. As a result, my country has one of the largest displaced populations in the world, as has been stated by various representatives of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons.

Moreover, purposeful measures are being undertaken by the Armenian side to prevent Azerbaijani internally displaced persons from returning to their homes and properties. Such measures include the implantation of settlers in the occupied territories, infrastructure changes and the destruction and desecration of historical and cultural heritage. Those activities undermine the rights and freedoms of hundreds of thousands of people uprooted from their homes and pose an imminent threat to peace, security and stability in the region.

Furthermore, as of 1 May, 3,888 citizens of Azerbaijan were registered missing in connection with the conflict. Among them are 718 civilians, including 71 children, 266 women and 326 elderly persons. As the Secretary-General points out in his report,

“It is incumbent on parties to conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law as it relates to missing persons [and in particular] to take all feasible measures to account for those reported missing”. (S/2019/373, para. 45)

In that connection, I would like to stress that the denial of the responsibility for crimes is a violation of human rights and a direct obstacle to lasting peace and genuine reconciliation.

In conclusion, we believe that it is critically important that the Security Council consistently maintain its focus on the protection of civilians affected by armed conflict and systematically reiterate its demand that all parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

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

Mr. Carrillo Gómez (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Paraguay, I am grateful for the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/373) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for the initiative by the Indonesian presidency to convene this open debate.

We believe that, with regard to the Security Council, the protection of civilians in armed conflict must be clearly and explicitly included in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. That protection must be a priority in situations where civilians are at high risk of violence and must also be explicit with regard to protection against sexual violence, in its broadest sense, and the specific protection of children and adolescents in armed conflict. The existing mandates of peacekeeping missions must also be amended in that regard.

We further emphasize that education and training in international humanitarian law and international human rights law to stop and prevent acts of violence, attacks and threats against civilians are critical to improving the system for the protection of civilians. In the context of peacekeeping operations, we stress the need for military and police personnel to receive general training on the protection of civilians in armed conflict prior to their deployment to missions, in line with the needs of the location where they will be deployed. The training of contingents once deployed in host countries should only be complementary to that received in the country of origin.

It is imperative that both the Security Council and States Members of the Organization, regardless of their status as parties to conflicts, contribute to establishing an effective system for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In its effort to contribute to

comprehensive political and legal frameworks for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Republic of Paraguay recently ratified the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute, thereby reaffirming its commitment to cooperation with the International Criminal Court in order to address and prevent impunity by ensuring justice and reparation for victims of international crimes. We also support the Secretary-General's proposal to Member States to participate constructively in the development of a political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We reiterate our adherence to the Santiago Communiqué of 2018 and urge Member States to adhere to the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration of 2015.

Finally, the Republic of Paraguay condemns disregard for the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law and international human rights law by parties to conflicts, in particular the practices of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare, restrictions on humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, and undermining the institution of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.

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

Mr. Skoknic Tapia (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Indonesia and you, Mr. President, for presiding over and convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their briefings this morning.

This debate is very timely, as it takes place at a time when the international community is commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and 20 years since the Security Council included the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Yet, despite all that, we continue to witness the suffering of millions of women, children and men trapped in conflicts around the world.

Chile is strongly committed to the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and directs its international action based on the promotion and protection of human security, defined as the right of people to live in freedom and dignity without fear of their overall development and human potential being threatened. Everyone, in particular the vulnerable, has

the right to live without fear and, in this case, civilians have the right not to be targets of war.

My delegation believes that in order for peace operations to be more effective in their key task, which is the protection of civilians, it is necessary for mandates to be clear and specific with regard to the aspects of that protection, with an appropriate assessment of the conditions on the ground. That also includes the need to improve information and intelligence work.

In that regard, I would like to echo the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373) and highlight the importance of disaggregated data of victims, which provide the necessary information to identify patterns of violence and risks to particular populations, including, as I have said, children, women, internally displaced persons, journalists, teachers, medical personnel and humanitarian workers.

We highlight the need to promote accountability and justice in the case of indiscriminate attacks and support the participation of entities such as the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission and independent civil society actors, which are valuable sources of information, especially those based in communities affected by conflict and with limited access.

I would like to reiterate my country's commitment to the protection of civilians from the use of explosive areas in populated areas, including through active participation in the focal points network on the issue and the convening in my country in December 2018 of the Latin American and Caribbean regional conference on protecting civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The outcome of the conference, in which 23 Member States participated, was the Santiago Communiqué, in which participants acknowledged the need to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and supported the development of a political declaration.

In line with the above, Chile is deeply committed to the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Safe Schools Declaration, signed in Oslo in May 2015. For our country, supporting those principles represents a way of contributing to the collective commitment to maintaining international peace and security so as to make the work of personnel deployed in peace operations more effective in

protecting civilians, in particular children, by helping to re-establish a sustained peace.

In conclusion, Chile reiterates its support for the reforms and the strengthening of the system for the protection of civilians in conflict, since it puts into practice the general principles of our foreign policy, such as strict compliance with international law, the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and support for multilateralism. The Council and the institutional framework of the United Nations must ensure the protection of civilians on the basis of effective, people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses. Chile will remain committed to that end, based on its pursuit of peace that inspires my country's diplomatic efforts.

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

Mr. Raum (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg thanks you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate on the important topic of the protection of civilians, which reflects Indonesia's commitment in that regard. My delegation fully associates itself with the statements made by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland, on behalf of the Group of Friends for the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/373), which contains useful recommendations. We share the irrefutable analysis of the Secretary-General and of the other briefers who have enhanced this debate.

In 2019, as we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) on the protection of civilians, the fact is that, despite the legislative progress made, armed conflicts, which not only afflict civilians but often deliberately target them, continue. The norms and rules of international humanitarian law are intended to protect all of humankind. It is our collective responsibility to defend and uphold those rules and standards and ensure that they are respected, and Luxembourg is actively engaged in that regard. We support the practical implementation of the code of conduct developed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group regarding timely and decisive action by the Security Council, as well as France and Mexico's initiative on limiting the use of the veto. We also support Switzerland's initiative to include in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court the

use of starvation as a war crime in non-international armed conflicts. Luxembourg would like to make four proposals.

First, all peace operations should have a civilian protection component when the situation on the ground requires it, and operations should be provided with the capacity they need to fulfil their mandate in that regard.

Secondly, if we are to change things, we must know how to measure them. Civilian casualties in conflicts must be effectively and independently tracked so that the United Nations can measure the extent of the challenge and improve the protection of civilians. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is a good example.

Thirdly, impunity must end, because it often leads to further violence. When Heads of State choose to pardon war criminals instead of bringing them to justice, they perpetuate impunity and sow the seeds of future crimes. In that context, Luxembourg fully supports the International Criminal Court and the work of its Prosecutor.

Fourthly, we must ensure that the connection between the protection of civilians and post-conflict peacebuilding is recognized. If warring parties and their international supporters target civilians and civilian infrastructure, they are not just guilty of war crimes, they are also ruining the chances of restoring and building just and lasting peace after a conflict. That is unfortunately evident in Syria, where Government forces and their allies continue to deliberately target civilians, hospitals and other protected facilities, in particular in Idlib.

The protection of civilians involves many of the topics on the Council's agenda. It overlaps with the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and with the fight against sexual violence in conflict and the protection of children in armed conflict. Luxembourg is committed to all of those areas and supports in particular the mandates of Special Representatives Virginia Gamba and Pramila Patten, as well as the framework for action of the Safe Schools Declaration and the Paris Principles and Commitments.

The continued engagement of the Council's permanent and elected members is essential to strengthening the protection of civilians while ensuring that United Nations peace operations have the mandate

and capacity to protect civilians — men, women and children — who are the most vulnerable to violence in today's conflicts, and to prevent conflicts before they claim other innocent victims.

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

Ms. Bird (Australia): Let me begin by warmly commending the Indonesian presidency for its successful leadership of the Council this month and for the focus it has given to today's important topic.

The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of States, a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law and a critical benchmark by which the performance of the United Nations is judged. Emerging in response to the international community's failures to prevent mass atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s, the protection-of-civilians agenda of the United Nations has become a critical component of the Security Council's work in maintaining international peace and security. While a solid normative protection-of-civilians framework has been established under international law and through Council practice, the realities on the ground often paint a different picture. The majority of casualties in armed conflict are civilians. Vast numbers are killed, maimed, raped, starved or forced to flee. Civilians are often indiscriminately targeted. I would like to make a few points about what more can be done to ensure the protection of civilians.

First, the Council must be more systematic, comprehensive and consistent in addressing protection concerns within and across conflict situations. Where peaceful means are inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations, the Council must uphold the international community's responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities. We urge all States to sign the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct and to support France and Mexico's initiative on veto restraint, to ensure that Council resolutions designed to prevent or halt mass atrocities are not blocked.

Secondly, the credibility and legitimacy of United Nations peacekeeping depends on the Council's capacity to act when civilians are under threat. The effective protection of civilians requires comprehensive and trusted engagement with local communities to understand and respond to their protection needs. We welcome the expansion of community liaison

alert networks and recognize the indispensable role of women and child protection advisers in combating sexual violence and the recruitment of child soldiers. We urge Council members to further explore the unarmed civilian protection methodologies employed by a number of organizations. Community engagement is central to the success of those efforts. Uniformed components must be well trained and equipped for protection-of-civilians tasks that require a proactive posture. New protection-of-civilian performance assessments will help address shortcomings and strengthen accountability. We encourage all troop-contributing countries to endorse the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

Thirdly, we must enhance and ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law in conflict. We welcome the development of national protection-of-civilians policies to ensure that international obligations are met and protection strategies are effective. In 2015, we adopted the Australian Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians. We applaud the ongoing engagement with States and non-State armed groups to deepen understanding and respect for international law, including ongoing efforts to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Finally, we support more robust and innovative approaches to accountability, including through sanctions and independent investigative mechanisms, to help bring justice and deter future crimes.

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

Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We share the concern reflected in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373), which points out that civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in conflict and are the targets of indiscriminate attacks and other violations. The States Members of the United Nations must act decisively to prevent conflicts, for conflict prevention is the safest and least costly way to protect civilians. To that end, the Charter of the United Nations, and its purposes and principles in particular, must be strictly respected. It is also essential to work to eradicate the underlying causes of conflicts, in particular by

supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Security Council must fulfil its vital responsibility to maintain international peace and security by encouraging respect for international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes. It should refrain from supporting military ventures and from resorting to the threat or use of force to resolve conflicts. The responsibility for conflict prevention and the protection of civilians during conflicts belongs to States. The international community, the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations can provide constructive assistance but cannot replace the role of the Governments of the countries concerned. They should support and complement the efforts of national Governments when requested, impartially and unconditionally, with strict respect for their sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. It is totally unacceptable for efforts to protect civilians to be used to advance the geopolitical interests of certain States or as a pretext for disregarding and violating the principles of the Charter and meddling in the internal affairs of States.

We firmly condemn the killing of innocent people and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against civilians. Their protection cannot serve as a pretext for legitimizing military interventions with the aim of imposing regime changes and overthrowing the legitimately established political, economic and social order.

We recognize that humanitarian assistance constitutes a fundamental component of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, but it must be provided in accordance with the principles of the Charter, international law, international humanitarian law and General Assembly resolution 46/182. The guiding principles of humanitarian assistance — humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence — must be respected, and assistance must be provided in accordance with international law and the national laws of the countries concerned, and with the consent of the host States. We reject the political manipulation of humanitarian assistance and the imposition and strengthening of unilateral coercive economic measures, which cause severe deprivation and harm to the very civilians they seek to protect.

All parties involved in hostilities must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian

law, as enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. That also applies to United Nations peacekeeping operations, particularly those with protection of civilian mandates. They must have realistic and achievable mandates, with concrete, clearly defined objectives and the necessary resources to avoid jeopardizing the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Peace operations with robust mandates that allow for the proactive use of force in the protection of civilians have not always ensured a safer environment. The flexible application or reinterpretation of peacekeeping principles has increased the risk of threats and attacks against United Nations personnel and affected their integrity, credibility and neutrality.

As the Secretary-General's report reflects, concrete improvements are possible, particularly if arms transfers to unauthorized non-State actors are prohibited, military expenditures and the exponential development of sophisticated conventional weapons reduced, lethal autonomous weapon systems and the use of military attack drones banned, and war machinery stopped and its resources reallocated to economic and social development.

As we commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Protocols Additional, relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts, their provisions remain in full force. The life and dignity of persons in hostilities must be protected and respected, without discrimination of any kind.

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

Ms. Bartolini (San Marino): I would like to thank the Indonesian presidency for convening this very important meeting. I would also like to thank the briefers for their presentations this morning. San Marino welcomes the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/373) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and supports its recommended measures.

As we approach the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, civilians continue to be victims of direct and indiscriminate attacks on a daily basis. They continue to be killed, targeted and forced to flee their homes. Even humanitarian and medical workers are often attacked, killed or kidnapped, and hospitals and medical facilities are bombed or looted. San Marino

firmly condemns such attacks, which are in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

The implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of health services in armed conflict, remains critical. San Marino also welcomes resolution 2417 (2018), which condemns the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access. Humanitarian space should always be respected, including in domestic counter-terrorism measures. San Marino also supports the Swiss proposal for an amendment in article 8 of the Rome Statute on the inclusion of starvation as a war crime in internal armed conflicts.

The situation of vulnerable groups is of great concern, since it tends to worsen during armed conflicts. Children, for example, are being recruited as soldiers, and their schools have been attacked, destroyed or used as military facilities. San Marino condemns those acts in the strongest terms and fully supports the development of action plans to prevent and end grave violations against children. San Marino has joined the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver Principles and the new #ACTtoProtect campaign — important instruments aimed at protecting children in conflicts and ensuring their rehabilitation and reintegration.

I would also like to highlight the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on persons with disabilities. Conflicts always cause physical impairments, primarily as a result of the use of explosive devices, which also disrupt basic services for the disabled, who are often unable to flee attacks. Furthermore, women and girls with disabilities are in particular at risk of violence and abuses. It is urgent and essential to act for the protection and assistance of those specific groups.

San Marino fully supports the Secretary-General's call on parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in urban centres. These weapons cause massive suffering to civilians. They damage and destroy their homes and critical infrastructure. We firmly believe that all parties should avoid the use of such devices in populated areas, and we support the Secretary-General's call to develop a political declaration as a measure to address that threat.

The Security Council has now been debating the item on today's agenda for 20 years. Much progress has been made, but it is essential that we continue to stress

the importance of respecting international humanitarian law. All parties must abide by these norms, and we need to prioritize measures to ensure accountability. In that regard, we welcome investigations at the national level and we call on States to support the work of the International Criminal Court. San Marino firmly believes that ensuring greater respect for international humanitarian law is one of the most effective ways to protect civilians.

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

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): We would like to thank the Indonesian presidency of the Security Council for the choice of the theme of today's open debate. We thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their briefings earlier today.

This meeting provides an important opportunity to reflect on the ways in which the global efforts for the protection of civilians have evolved over the past 20 years. We recognize the considerable progress achieved within the Organization and the efforts of the Security Council to strengthen the normative framework of the protection agenda. At the same time, we are concerned about the persisting challenges highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/373) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Supporting impartiality and independence in humanitarian action and providing safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access is crucial to preventing and alleviating the suffering of civilians caught up in conflict. Attempts to politicize humanitarian access, along with the refusal to cooperate at the level of the relevant authorities, demonstrate an intention to deliberately impede efforts to protect and assist those in need. We strongly condemn violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as violence, threats and intimidation against journalists and media workers.

Armenia has been consistent in advancing the prevention and protection agendas, including through our involvement in United Nations and United Nations-mandated peace and stability operations, namely, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. We have also shown a consistent

commitment to helping to alleviate the suffering of populations in areas affected by crisis, as reflected in our national humanitarian mission in Syria in response to the request of the Syrian authorities and the Armenian community. Demining specialists from Armenia are currently operating in the southern communities of Aleppo, and our medical team provides assistance in four hospitals, as well as in a medical facility under the Armenian Relief Cross of Syria in Aleppo.

Promoting the norms of international humanitarian law and raising awareness in that regard is an important element in Armenia's security-sector governance. International humanitarian law is incorporated in the curricula of Armenia's military educational institutions. We also highly appreciate the cooperation with the ICRC in implementing training projects and reaching out to people affected by conflict who are in need of humanitarian assistance. Armenia's commitment to promoting the importance of the safety of children and students in armed conflict is reflected in its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration.

We fully recognize the importance of the empowerment of women and how it is linked and intertwined with sustainable peace and development efforts on different levels. An important example of women's participation in peacebuilding efforts is the Women for Peace initiative led by the spouse of the Prime Minister of Armenia, as an inclusive platform for women and mothers to promote peace and reconciliation in our region and beyond. Armenia is fully committed to the promotion of gender-sensitive policies and has adopted a national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) that prioritizes the enhancement of training and career-development possibilities for women, with a view to increasing their participation in peacebuilding activities.

The civilian population of Nagorno Karabakh and the bordering regions of Armenia have been constantly exposed to serious humanitarian risks. Azerbaijan's attempted aggression against Nagorno Karabakh in April 2016 was accompanied by grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including barbaric acts rising to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as beheadings, mutilations and other atrocity crimes. Attacks and indiscriminate shelling, including of a school building, inflicted losses on our civilian populations, including children and the elderly.

The international community should resolutely condemn any pursuit of military solutions to conflict situations. We reject any alternative to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The ceasefire agreements of 1994 and 1995 signed by Nagorno Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia constitute the foundation of the cessation of hostilities. Armenia urges Azerbaijan to undertake genuine steps to create conditions conducive to advancing the peace process. Azerbaijan should bring an end to its persistent warmongering and cultivation of hatred and intolerance against Armenians and instead invest real efforts in promoting a culture of peace and respect for human rights.

The effective utilization of the capacity of the regional dimension in the prevention and resolution of conflict is of the utmost importance. Armenia welcomes the support of the international community, the United Nations and the Secretary-General for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group co-chairmanship towards the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Protecting civilians in armed conflicts is closely linked to the prevention of mass atrocities, including the crime of genocide. To be effective in our determination to protect, a primary role should be given to early action on warning signs of deteriorating situations that can potentially result in conflicts, atrocities and human suffering. As is well known, crises, atrocities and genocides do not occur overnight; they are detectable and predictable. The denial of past crimes, impunity and discrimination and the prevalence of hate speech are among the precipitating factors leading to massive crimes and conflict and represent explicit and detectable early-warning signs. We are of the view that the Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect has a prominent function in detecting such risks. The United Nations system should do more to engage affected populations, including women and girls, and support entities that amplify their voices.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to extend to the President and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia the appreciation of the League of Arab States for their initiative in holding today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

This meeting coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, including the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war. I would also like to express our appreciation for the leading role played by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Committee of the Red Cross as impartial and credible organizations in applying the provisions of international humanitarian law and providing maximum protection for defenceless civilians who are victims of armed conflict. I also thank this morning's briefers.

Undoubtedly, the Security Council's discussion today of this important topic, following the meeting held last month under the German presidency on promoting and strengthening the rule of law in the maintenance of international peace and security (see S/PV.8499), is a testament of the fact that the Council is determined to ensure that States Members of the United Nations uphold their commitments set forth in international treaties and legal instruments on international humanitarian law, which they ratified without politicization or double standards, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians.

The ongoing current crises — mostly in Africa, the Arab world and Asia — have led to a surge in humanitarian needs. There are about 140 million persons in dire need of humanitarian assistance, mostly owing to armed conflict, which is three times the number 10 years ago. The problem is aggravated by a new trend among certain warring parties and their sponsors to not uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law. The successive events in Palestine, Syria, Libya, the Sudan, Iraq, Somalia and other Arab States are stark examples of this trend, which clearly reveals double standards and selectivity in dealing with situations involving refugees, displaced persons and others affected by waves of armed conflict spreading across the Arab world, on the one hand, or of terrorism, on the other, which deeply affects civilians without regard to their race, creed or religion on the other.

The attack against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that we witnessed during yesterday's Security Council meeting on the Middle East with regard to the Agency's role in providing relief to Palestinian refugees (see S/PV.8532) is definitive proof that some States do not respect humanitarian work. Rather, they

seek to undermine the international solidarity that supports the exemplary work of UNRWA as it serves 5.3 million Palestinian refugees. The United States of America has cut its funding for UNRWA and sought to exclude the refugee issue and the issue of Jerusalem from any final-status negotiations, while seeking to undermine the deep-rooted international legitimacy of the Middle East peace process, whose objective is to bring about — through direct negotiations between the State of Palestine and Israel, without interference or pressure by any partial external parties — the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and based on the 1967 borders. The League of Arab States will continue to uphold this legitimacy through the implementation of its resolutions adopted at the ministerial and summit levels, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative, which is the overarching framework of the various Arab positions on the Palestinian question.

Any discussion on the protection of civilians must include the protection of the defenceless Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories from the cruelty of the Israeli occupation and settlers, who have been shedding the blood of Palestinian civilians especially since the incidents of Earth Day on 30 March 2018. That has claimed the lives of more than 400 Palestinians and injured tens of thousands more. All of this is happening as the Security Council has been clearly unable to act; whereas the Group of Arab States has asked the Council to adopt a draft resolution on establishing a clear mechanism to protect the Palestinian people against the attacks of the Israeli army and settlers. One permanent Council members has even used its veto to stand against the international collective will and portrayed Hamas and Islamic Jihad as those responsible, and not Israel, the occupying Power, which continues to violate the Geneva Conventions without deterrence.

The tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which reconvened on 13 June 2018, adopted resolution ES-10/20, which requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on specific proposals for the establishment of a mechanism to protect the Palestinian people. Although the Secretary-General indeed submitted his report to both the General Assembly and the Security Council, the Council neither discussed it, at even a single meeting, nor sought to agree on a mechanism for the protection of the Palestinian people under occupation.

That failure encouraged Israel, the occupying Power, to proceed with ending the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, which had been ongoing since 1994. That was another flagrant violation by Israel of all its commitments on the protection of civilians in accordance with Geneva Conventions, especially given that the justifications for establishing the International Presence to protect the defenceless Palestinian people still exist, as does, moreover, the continued illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.

The international community, and the Security Council in particular, has a duty to robustly defend humanitarian work based on international legal principles. All Member States must fight against any exploitation of humanitarian work, as well as against manipulating or politicizing it. Humanitarian assistance must therefore not be halted, especially for those who cannot meet their basic needs. We must support impartial and fair organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Red Crescent Society, as well as facilitate their work instead of impeding and restricting it. We must also increase humanitarian funding, particularly for UNRWA. States must implement the commitments they undertook under the Geneva Conventions 70 years ago, within a framework of transparency and credibility. Most important, there must be accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law and the norms and principles of the Geneva Conventions, and above all for the international legitimacy represented by the Council and its ability to oblige whomever dares violate those provisions to commit to them and be held accountable. The League of Arab States has confidence in the ability of the Security Council to do so.

The President: I now give the floor to the Special Representative of the NATO Secretary-General for Women, Peace and Security.

Ms. Hutchinson: I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on the protection of civilians and for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on behalf of NATO.

The protection of the civilian population is a centrepiece of NATO's work, equally relevant to each of our overarching core tasks, namely, collective defence, cooperative security and crisis management. NATO leaders have adopted a holistic approach on the protection of civilians, recognizing that civilian protection goes far beyond just high-intensity military

operations. For NATO, the protection agenda is all-encompassing. It integrates the cross-cutting areas of children and armed conflict, women and peace and security, conflict-related sexual violence, cultural property protection and human trafficking.

Over the past decade, NATO and its partners have elevated the commitment to protecting civilians and, in line with the Council's guidance, has developed a diverse and robust body of policies and doctrine in the planning and conduct of operations and missions. NATO's 2016 policy on the protection of civilians sets out a coherent, consistent and integrated approach on protection. Its guiding principles require that all NATO-led operations and missions be conducted in accordance with applicable international law. The policy was developed together with all member nations and 26 NATO partners, and in consultation with the United Nations and other international organizations. It is strengthened by a concrete action plan, implemented by allies and partners and regularly reviewed by the North Atlantic Council.

While the NATO-led missions and operations change and evolve over time, our commitment to the cross-cutting areas of protection remains steadfast. For example, today NATO's mandate in Afghanistan is limited solely to training, advising and assisting, because NATO does not conduct combat operations, as reflected in the NATO-Afghanistan status of forces agreement, whose signing was noted by the Council.

We have incorporated lessons from the past into all areas of our civilian protection mandate, while giving specific attention to the protection of women and children. NATO recognizes that the protection children in conflict is of the utmost importance. Together with the United Nations, we have developed practical, field-oriented measures to address conflict-related violations against children.

NATO's 2015 policy document entitled "Protection of Children in Armed Conflict — the Way Forward" provides additional guidance on integrating Security Council resolutions into the alliance's military doctrine, education, training and exercises. It includes standing operating procedures for monitoring and reporting violations against children in NATO military operations on the ground. We are particularly proud of our efforts in assisting the Afghan authorities in developing their first child-protection policy. The policy aims to shield children from the adverse effects of armed conflict, and

especially to prevent perpetrators of violence against children in combat operations.

We are also constantly advancing our work on efforts to better protect women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence. The long-term destructive nature of conflict-related sexual violence, as well as its grave effect on entire communities, continues to pose significant threats to global peace and security. In response, in June 2015, we developed military guidelines on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence.

NATO allies have strongly committed to putting the protection of civilians at the core of our operations and missions in how they train soldiers, operate in the field and interact with civilians in combat zones. While standards and training alone are not the only answer, they do ensure that personnel recognize the different populations affected by conflict and are trained to prevent, recognize and respond to violations. The recognition that predeployment training is critical to articulating those principles and translating them into operational effect is key. NATO nations therefore undertake mandatory predeployment training on the protection of civilians and children and armed conflict for personnel deployed to NATO-led missions and operations.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that NATO's commitment to civilian protection is indisputable. NATO's policy on the protection of civilians demonstrates the shared commitment of all NATO allies to strengthening efforts to better protect civilian populations. Reflecting on lessons learned, we will continue to reinforce our collective protection mandate by building up institutional capacity, training and dedicating resources as needed. That is a vital part of creating lasting cultural changes and guaranteeing the rights of all citizens.

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

Mr. Gad (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure, at the outset, to express our sincere thanks to the Republic of Indonesia for organizing this debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to express our appreciation to Her Excellency Mrs. Retno Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, for presiding over this meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Executive Director

of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their thorough briefings to the Security Council.

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions, following the end of the Second World War. The Conventions were not merely legally binding international instruments. They were also the result of a painful humanitarian experience caused by the scourge of the Second World War. The international community drew many lessons from those experiences, which in turn were translated into a number of principles, purposes and fundamental norms that were enshrined in the Conventions. They now form the cornerstone of the rules of international law. The Conventions guaranteed protection for people from the scourge of war and its destructive effects, in particular for those not involved in acts of aggression, including the wounded, the sick, prisoners and civilians, as well as civilians living under occupation. The Conventions called for the protection of their lives and dignity without discrimination.

This year also coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and the inclusion of the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda.

There has been major development at the conceptual level with regard to the protection of civilians, in particular since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which placed the issue of protecting civilians at the top priorities of the Security Council and as one of the fundamental pillars of the peacekeeping mandates. However, it is a source of grave concern that that conceptual development was not accompanied by progress in translating it into concrete measures to protect civilians on the ground. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of conflicts and constitute the vast majority of their victims.

The tragedies of civilians in many of today's world conflicts, in particular in the Middle East and Africa, pose an unprecedented challenge to the fundamental pillars of international humanitarian law and the enforcement of the principle of protecting civilians in armed conflict, especially women and children, who are the most vulnerable to violations.

Egypt recognizes its responsibility to prevent such violations. That is why we have made tireless efforts to advance the agenda of protecting civilians within the United Nations system, including the initiative in which we participated along with four other non-permanent

members of the Security Council at the time. The purpose was to introduce a draft resolution on medical protection in armed conflict, which was later adopted as resolution 2286 (2016) at the very beginning of Egypt's presidency of the Security Council in May 2016

Also, based on Egypt's belief in the importance of promoting the frameworks and governing principles of peacekeeping operations, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians, we acceded to the Kigali Principles, in November 2018, as well as to the voluntary compact on combating sexual exploitation and abuse. Egypt has also taken a number of national measures and actions in support of the agenda of protecting civilians in peacekeeping operations. Moreover, at the March Ministerial on Peacekeeping, Egypt pledged to hold training sessions on comprehensive protection for civilians, which are currently being developed.

It is no secret that peacekeeping operations face serious challenges in implementing the protection of civilians mandate in armed conflict. There has been a significant qualitative and quantitative change in the nature of conflicts. Contemporary conflicts are usually characterized by the phenomenon of non-State armed actors systematically targeting civilians as a military strategy. Furthermore, conflicts are increasingly taking place in densely populated areas where explosive weapons with indiscriminate effects on civilians are used. All that requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the specific characteristics of each conflict and prioritizes above all the protection of civilians, particularly women, children and the most vulnerable.

In order to be effective, the protection of civilians in armed conflict cannot be limited to material or physical protection. It also must focus basically on finding political solutions to end a conflict and prevent its recurrence. As well, it must address the root causes of conflict and take a more comprehensive approach that addresses the challenges of eradicating poverty and socioeconomic marginalization, while promoting the role of national institutions and mechanisms involved in preventing and managing conflicts, regardless of their nature, as well as promoting stability and ensuring that all parties to a conflict comply with the rules and provisions of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and ensuring that violators are held accountable. In addition, more attention is needed in future to address new challenges

that threaten civilians, above all the spread of international terrorism.

We also stress that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies with States and Governments. The goal of peacekeeping operations is to strengthen the ability of States to fulfil their commitments. At the same time, peacekeeping operations must respect the principles of sovereignty, national ownership and the culture of the host State.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that our meeting today constitutes an opportunity to assess the scale of progress made with regard to the implementation of the agenda related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We strongly stress promoting the noble values and principles of international humanitarian law on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in particular the most vulnerable, including women and children, without politicization or selectivity.

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

Mr. Pildegovičs (Latvia): I would like to thank the Indonesian presidency for organizing a debate on this important topic. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/373) and the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their respective briefings.

Latvia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

As we reflect today on the progress made over the past 20 years since the protection of civilians in armed conflict was prioritized by the United Nations, Latvia agrees with the previous speakers that there have been important advancements, especially in the normative framework. The protection of civilians during armed conflict is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law, which is binding for all parties to armed conflict, State and non-State alike. International humanitarian law also identifies and protects particularly vulnerable civilian groups, such as women, children and displaced persons.

The Security Council has strengthened the framework for the protection of civilians through its relevant resolutions, including prioritizing the issue in peacekeeping mandates. We believe that the international community has grown more aware of the need to prevent and stop violations against civilian populations during conflicts, especially owing to the

nature and media coverage of contemporary conflicts. It must be noted that the Council has heard many moving testimonies by survivors of conflicts.

The legal framework is solid and relevant. Yet, despite those developments, civilian protection in armed conflicts has not been sufficient. The latest report of the Secretary-General once again confirms that far too many civilians continue to be robbed of their lives, health, future prospects and homes. Challenges remain to the protection of civilians in diverse conflict-affected areas, including Syria, Yemen, Libya and Ukraine, to name but a few. It is extremely worrisome when parties to a conflict fail to spare the civilian population and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations, as required under international humanitarian law.

Latvia is deeply concerned that the civilian population is often deliberately targeted by parties to an armed conflict, illegal armed groups and terrorist organizations. The use of air-launched, explosive and — more deplorable — chemical weapons in populated urban areas, forced displacement, sexual and gender-based violence, starvation, sieges and the denial of much-needed humanitarian assistance have become frequently used methods of warfare. Latvia strongly condemns attacks on civilian objects, as well as on humanitarian and health-care infrastructure and personnel in armed conflict, which unfortunately continued at a high rate last year. We welcome all efforts by the Security Council to address that serious issue. Regrettably, increasing humanitarian needs will likely continue, including conflict-related forced displacement. In that regard, Latvia emphasizes the need to allow safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to populations in need.

The facts on the ground show that greater compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to armed conflicts in protecting civilians is necessary. We therefore support the recommendations of the Secretary-General contained in his latest report on how to strengthen the practical impact of the protection agenda. Those recommendations should be addressed with a sense of urgency.

As the current President of the fifth Conference of States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty, Latvia is pleased to see that the report also addresses the context of arms exports and transfers, and encourages all States to become parties to the Arms Trade Treaty and similar regional instruments without delay.

Latvia believes that promoting the protection of civilians in all United Nations activities is essential. The Security Council must view this matter as a priority when addressing situations of concern, and it must remain an important component of United Nations peacekeeping mandates. We reiterate our call on the permanent members of the Security Council to refrain from the use of the veto in situations of atrocity crimes.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the fundamental legal obligation and our common interest to promote and ensure the effective protection of civilians from the devastating consequences of armed conflict. Impunity for disregarding humanitarian principles in present-day conflicts must not become the new normal. In the absence of accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, such violations will only continue to proliferate.

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

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank the Indonesian presidency of the Security Council, particularly Her Excellency Mrs. Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, for organizing this open debate. I also thank the briefers for their input.

I associate myself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is a source of grave concern that civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts. The worst aspect of this issue is that most of the victims are among the most vulnerable civilians — women and children. Recalling that 2019 marks the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of four Geneva Conventions, the question arises as to why we still face — as confirmed by the Council — the erosion of respect for international humanitarian law, despite those and other important legally binding instruments. Citing certain examples from our own region, I will try to briefly answer that question.

According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/373), not only did civilian casualties increase in Afghanistan in 2018, but so did civilian casualties resulting from the use of air-launched weapons — by 61 per cent — the highest number in a single year since 2009. What was the Council's reaction to such a violation of international humanitarian law by United States and NATO forces?

In Syria, where, in accordance with our obligations and religious teachings, we accord the highest priority to the protection of civilians, a United Nations assessment mission to Raqqa in April 2018 found that nearly 70 per cent of buildings in the city had been destroyed or damaged and that essential services, such as water, electricity and health care, were absent or severely limited. Did the Council hold the United States and its partners accountable for such a clear violation of international humanitarian law?

In Gaza, during the Great March of Return, for the period from 30 March 2018 to 29 March 2019, Israel brutally killed nearly 280 civilians, including 56 children, and wounded nearly 32,000 others, more than 3,000 of whom were children. The Council has been completely silent on those crimes. The inhumane blockade of Gaza by Israel — the clearest violation of international humanitarian law and a crime against humanity — entered its twelfth year in 2019.

Lastly, according to the Secretary-General's report, civilian casualties increased in Yemen throughout 2018, with a devastating impact on children. On 9 August 2018, in a single incident, a school bus in the market of a densely populated area in Dhahyan was deliberately targeted by Saudi Arabia. The attack left 52 civilians dead, among them 40 children, and 79 wounded, including 56 children. It was the single-worst attack since 2015. What was the Council's reaction?

In conclusion, I would like to cite two examples from a United Nations publication published by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“In 2015, the Israel Defense Forces were initially listed but removed prior to the report's publication [and]; [i]n 2016, the Saudi-led coalition, which had been listed for grave violations in Yemen, was removed from the listing following political pressure”. (*Building a Culture of Protection*, p. 32, footnote 132)

The conclusion that can be drawn is that respect for international humanitarian law continues to be eroded because criminals are not held accountable, because they continue to commit those crimes with impunity and because they are emboldened to disregard international humanitarian law and commit further brutalities. The Council can show its seriousness in protecting civilians, which is a legal obligation as well as a moral imperative, by putting an end to a policy based on political considerations.

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

Mr. Ikiara (Kenya): I thank the President for organizing this important open debate. I also thank His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Peter Mauer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Federico Borello, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict, for their informative briefings earlier. We take note of the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373) and the concept note (S/2019/385, annex) that you, Mr. President, provided to guide this debate, which marks the seventieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council seizing the protection of civilians in armed conflict as an agenda item.

The Security Council's continued consideration of this agenda item is an indication of its commitment to protecting civilians in conflict situations. Civilians continue to account for most casualties in armed conflicts today. According to successive reports of the Secretary-General, it has become a constant problem in many conflict-affected regions, especially in Africa, such as the Central African Republic, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, as well as Syria, among others, where hundreds of thousands of civilians have been uprooted from their normal daily lives by the effects of conflict.

We must continue to make concrete and specific efforts to ensure the dignity of those distressed by war. The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a humanitarian as well as a human rights issue and is in conformity with international humanitarian law. Although there have been some achievements in that area in the past few years, including increased engagement by the Council through the adoption of resolutions 1738 (2006), 2175 (2014) and 2286 (2016) and prioritizing the protection of civilians in peacekeeping mandates, much remains to be done.

My delegation notes with concern that today's conflicts are increasingly non-conventional and are characterized by armed insurgencies where civilians are used by armed groups and terrorist organizations both as human shields and as potential recruits as fighters, including child soldiers. The protection of civilians is put at risk, as national and international responses require anti-insurgent and counter-terrorist measures

that are in strict conformity to obligations under international humanitarian law. That is a challenge that we believe all Member States need to address boldly and sustainably.

I would like to address a few areas that are of concern to my delegation. They include the issue of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, a lack of clarity of mandates of peacekeeping missions and their scope, the absence of common applicable doctrine, resource gaps and difficulties in the integration of the diverse set of military, police and civilian actors required for effective protection of civilians. All such factors affect the overall capability of missions to effectively protect civilians.

Historically, gender-based violence has been used as a calculated tactic of war. Extremism and terrorism are prominent features of conflict situations often posing new forms of threats to women's rights and lives. Women who are, or are assumed to be, family members of fighters are often targeted by security actors and experience harassment within their communities, affecting their ability to live freely. In areas where civilians affected by conflict receive aid and other humanitarian support, women and girls have been forced to provide sexual favours and bribes in order to receive their portion of support. In many cases, women have been faced with the impossible choice of either putting themselves at risk of violence or saving their husbands, brothers and sons, who, as men, are often targeted to be killed or kidnapped.

Kenya condemns sexual exploitation and abuse by those entrusted to protect civilians. We need to prevent and combat those violations of women's and girls' fundamental human rights. As a troop-contributing country, we are committed to the implementation of resolution 2272 (2016), which seeks to hold accountable troop-contributing countries that fail to credibly deal with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. Kenya is already implementing the resolution by strengthening sexual exploitation and abuse predeployment training.

Kenya fully endorses the Vancouver communiqué, which specifies that United Nations peacekeeping missions must have clear and achievable mandates, as well as the resources and capability to carry them out. Peacekeepers have been faced with more complex environments with ever-increasing security risks and peacekeeper casualties are more now than they have ever been before.

The Security Council's mandates must be explicit, practical and with an unambiguous focus, taking full note of the fundamental tasks of the peacekeepers and the situation on the ground. Troop-contributing countries must be involved in the deliberations on those mandates as they are developed and adjusted for their on-the-ground expertise and point of view.

Accordingly, commanders tasked to execute such mandates should be allowed the necessary latitude devoid of unrealistic caveats. That is the only way to ensure effective country-specific strategies in peacekeeping. We must ensure that all components receive the proper training, skills and equipment to be able to protect civilians as well as themselves and to deliver on such mandates in accordance with applicable law.

In conclusion, Kenya fully affirms its commitment to enhancing its performance with regard to the protection of civilians and encourages all Member States to do the same by supporting the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which seek to assist peacekeepers in effectively implementing their protection of civilian mandates. Their full implementation would make peacekeeping missions more effective, improve civilian security and save lives.

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

Mr. Barro (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Indonesian presidency of convening this open debate and to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Maurer and Mr. Federico Borello for their very informative briefings this morning.

The adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) reflected the Security Council's clear awareness of the importance of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

That awareness has led, *inter alia*, to including explicit provisions on the protection of civilians in the mandates of several peace operations, the deployment of protection of civilians advisers in some peace missions and the development of guidelines on the implementation of civilian protection mandates for the United Nations Police.

While there is no doubt that significant progress has been made in the area, it is clear that, as the latest report of the Secretary-General on this topic (S/2019/373) shows so well, civilians continue to be

targets of armed attacks, both by non-State armed groups and by regular armies. The increasing number of civilians killed or wounded — more than 22,800 in 2018 alone — the destruction of civilian infrastructure, the many obstacles to humanitarian convoys, the indiscriminate use of weapons of mass destruction, the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, the recruitment of child soldiers and forced displacement are, among other things, scourges that sufficiently demonstrate the extent of civilian vulnerability in armed conflicts.

In addition, peacekeepers are regularly called upon to protect civilians with limited resources and in often very large and changing security environments where new forms of threats are emerging and where it can be difficult to differentiate between civilians and combatants.

On the eve of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, on which the Secretary-General will award, for the first time, the Captain Mbaye Diagne Medal for Exceptional Courage to Private Chancy Chitete of Malawi, I would like to pay a warm tribute to all those who have fallen in the service of peace. I would particularly like to commend the work and memory of Captain Diagne, who was killed in Rwanda in 1994 after having saved countless human lives.

To be effective and efficient, the protection of civilians must be part of an inclusive approach that promotes better coordination between the Security Council, which defines the protection-of-civilians mandates of peace missions, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support, which are responsible for planning and managing peace operations, and troop-contributing and host countries. As part of that approach, efforts should also be made to engage non-State actors in upholding humanitarian and human rights standards and to incorporate the obligation to protect civilians into peace and ceasefire agreements. It is also crucial to ensure that missions have clear and realistic mandates for the protection of civilians, since, as the Secretary-General has said, ensuring the safety of civilians requires clarifying what is expected of peacekeepers and identifying situations that may exceed their capacity to respond.

The establishment and strengthening of protection-of-civilian training for personnel awaiting deployment, as well as those already deployed in operations, is another challenge. Senegal has its own model. For example, our intervention reserve

infantry battalions in Mopti and Gao, as well as its attack helicopter unit deployed in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, are trained to maintain a permanent proactive posture. It is also important to bear in mind the importance of providing missions with appropriate equipment in order to strengthen peacekeepers' operational capabilities and thereby enable them to maintain superiority amid negative forces.

Particular emphasis should also be placed on information-sharing through close cooperation with host and neighbouring countries but also, and above all, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities, in order to identify threats and develop appropriate responses. In that regard, I want to point to the findings of the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) on the importance of working closely with NGOs and local communities in promoting unarmed strategies for the protection of civilians. Furthermore, the ability to communicate in the language of the host country certainly helps to make the protection of civilians more effective through the interactions it facilitates with the local population and the trust it builds between the people and peacekeeping personnel.

Lastly, since the protection of civilians is closely linked to security-sector reform, it is essential to fully execute disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for former combatants and support host countries in consolidating their defence and security forces' presence throughout their territory.

Accountability in cases of gross and systematic human rights violations ensures the credibility of mechanisms for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is therefore important to focus on measures aimed at prosecuting the perpetrators of such abuses. Senegal fully supports that vision, which requires strengthening international initiatives to investigate and prosecute those who violate international humanitarian law and human rights.

In conclusion, my delegation believes that the best way to protect civilians is to create an environment that promotes prevention and where special attention is paid to the root causes of conflict and to inclusive and lasting development.

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

Mr. Penaranda (Philippines): The Philippines associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The protection of civilians is at the front and centre of the dialogue on peacekeeping operations. It has been 20 years since an explicit mandate on the protection of civilians was established for the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone. The late former Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for a culture of protection to permeate the United Nations system and the mindset of those in the field. In 2015, what are now the Departments of Peace Operations and Operational Support defined the protection of civilians around three tiers of protection — protection through dialogue and engagement, the provision of physical protection and the establishment of a protective environment.

In theory and practice, the protection of civilians has gained traction among Member States and has become a priority in nine United Nations peacekeeping missions to which 95 per cent of peacekeepers are currently deployed. However, the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate is beset by three key challenges. First, missions tend to implement the protection-of-civilians mandate in a process-oriented way or based on activities; secondly, there is a disconnect between the protection of civilians and political strategy; and thirdly, there is the question of how to apply a whole-of-mission strategy, which involves the political, civilian, military and police components, in order to pursue a protection-of-civilians mandate. We are hopeful that those challenges will be clearly addressed by the Declaration of Shared Commitments on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, under the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative, adopted by 151 Member States in September.

We commend Indonesia, in its presidency of the Security Council, for today's ministerial-level open debate on the subject, an appropriate follow-up to the open debate on investing in peace (see S/PV.8521) held two weeks ago. Much is expected of the mandate giving first priority to the protection of civilians in peacekeeping, with an emphasis on the protection of children and on combating sexual exploitation and abuse. As it should be, it is the standard by which the performance of United Nations peacekeeping is measured, affecting its legitimacy and credibility. The Philippines reiterates its support for Security Council and General Assembly resolutions that underscore the

principal issue of preventing conflicts and protecting civilians if conflict does break out. We would like to make the following suggestions.

First, predeployment training should be incentivized to draw on existing policy, guidance and training resources to explain what the protection of civilians means in a given operational context, defining the responsibilities, opportunities and constraints that peacekeepers deployed in that context face. The Philippines encourages Member States to host centres of excellence by region to deliver training packages to troop- and police-contributing countries consistent with United Nations standards.

Secondly, the Philippines encourages the deployment of more women in United Nations peacekeeping operations, including in positions of command. The Philippines has an all-female civilian-relations company from the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police to assist in the rehabilitation and recovery of internally displaced persons from the Marawi crisis. They complement peacekeeping operations by helping internally displaced persons, conducting peace education and extending psychosocial debriefing among the traumatized, particularly women, children and young people.

Finally, the Philippines calls on the Secretary-General and Member States to promote unarmed strategies and unarmed civilian protection as a key complement to the protection-of-civilians toolkit — no arms, no mistaken intentions and therefore no excuses. The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process acknowledges civil society's active role in bringing peace to Mindanao through, for example, Ceasefire Watch, Spaces for Peace, Mothers for Peace and Tiyakap Kalilintad, or Care for Peace, which partner with Government agencies. In 2009, the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front agreed to expand the mandate of the international monitoring team to include civilian protection. That civilian-based ceasefire monitoring and response is a model for other countries in conflict. Grass-roots leaders from various countries have travelled to Mindanao to learn more about it on the ground. In May 2017, the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front established a peace corridor to first provide a safe and secure corridor for the rescue of trapped individuals in conflict areas, and secondly to provide a secure space for humanitarian assistance to pass through the province most affected

by the Marawi crisis. At the end of its operations in Marawi, a total of 255 civilians were rescued and safe passage of aid was provided to many Government and humanitarian organizations.

I want to conclude by noting that an effective protection-of-civilians mandate must be anchored in human rights and international humanitarian law, particularly with regard to vulnerable groups, as well as in adherence to the principles of accountability, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding.

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

Mr. Ahmad Tajuddin (Malaysia): I would first like to thank the Indonesian presidency for convening this important open debate.

Malaysia associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and the statement to be delivered by the representative of Viet Nam, on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Malaysia reaffirms the importance it attaches to general principles on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Secretary-General's latest report on the subject (S/2019/373) reflects the grim reality that the state of the protection of civilians today is tragically similar to that of 20 years ago. We are troubled that civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in situations of armed conflict.

Malaysia remains deeply concerned about the fact that deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians are common in armed conflicts. Innocent civilians should never be made victims or victims for ransom, and any actions detrimental to civilians' well-being are by definition acts of cowardice and should never be condoned. In that context, Malaysia reaffirms its support for prioritizing protection-of-civilians mandates in peacekeeping missions. There is no question that modern peacekeeping missions are multidimensional, with tasks that address the full spectrum of peacebuilding activities, from providing secure environments to monitoring human rights and rebuilding the capacity of the State. Increasingly, such mandates also instruct peacekeeping missions to stress the physical protection of civilians. The link between the protection of civilians and peacekeeping mandates is central. The safety and security of civilians is critical

to the legitimacy and credibility of peacekeeping missions. While missions work to manage high expectations, they must also address the security of civilians in order to carry out their mandated tasks in assisting local reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts. The protection of civilians is also a critical component of sustainable peace.

The credibility of United Nations peacekeepers depends largely on their willingness to act when civilians are at risk to threats. Any failure of peacekeepers to act or follow orders should be brought to the attention of the Council. In addition, the Council must be prepared to provide political and operational support when threats to civilians exist. Malaysia therefore welcomes the Secretary-General's efforts to improve the performance of peacekeepers through his Action for Peacekeeping initiative. We share the view that military and police personnel should receive predeployment training on the protection of civilians, child protection and the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence in accordance with United Nations standards. For its part, Malaysia, through the Malaysian Peacekeeping Centre, has successfully organized courses for peacekeeping personnel on the protection of civilians.

Malaysia has consistently expressed concern about the humanitarian situation of communities affected by armed conflict and the need to alleviate their suffering. As the protection-of-civilians agenda has been a focus of the Council over the last two decades, it is important to ensure that the Council continues to advance the discourse. It should send a clear message that impunity must end and that all parties, including State and non-State actors, should be held accountable for violations of international humanitarian law. Malaysia therefore urges all permanent Security Council members to refrain from invoking their veto power in situations where the lives and well-being of civilians in armed conflict are at stake.

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

Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine): I would like to thank the Indonesian presidency for convening this important debate. We also thank the International Committee of the Red Cross for its briefing and indispensable humanitarian work and the Center for Civilians in Armed Conflict for its briefing and important advocacy work.

At this critical moment, we must reflect not only on our collective duty and responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict, but also consider real and practical solutions for addressing the serious challenges we face in fulfilling that sacred obligation. Failure to uphold international law, including the very clear provisions of humanitarian law crafted to protect civilians in times of war, and a failure to implement Security Council resolutions relevant to the protection of civilians, including children, has enabled a fierce culture of impunity to grow and spread as a source of shocking, serious breaches and pervasive violations of human rights that have caused immense suffering, displacement, loss of life and injury, and trauma for enormous numbers of innocent civilians. It is unconscionable that 80 per cent of casualties in conflicts today are civilians. Vulnerable men, women and children around the world continue, and regrettably will continue, to endure such injustice, indignities and insecurity for as long as the international community continues to hesitate to match its principled words and commitments with serious action to stop those violations. The role of the Security Council is central in that regard.

While humanitarian action continues to be pursued worldwide to treat the suffering caused by armed conflicts, it cannot stop the bloodletting. We have seen that over and over again in crises across the years, in which the norms and rules for protecting civilians are not only disregarded but are even more blatantly and gravely breached through prolonged conflict and an absence of accountability. Protecting innocent people requires establishing enforcement measures that hold perpetrators accountable within the full extent of the law, including international criminal law. Without consequences or costs, modern history has shown us that these violations and war crimes will never cease.

Palestine is one of the most glaring cases facing the international community. Time and again it has been said that the Palestine question is a litmus test for the international community, the credibility of the Security Council and the rules-based order. That is more true today than ever, and the stakes are high. For decades now the Palestinian people have suffered grave breaches of humanitarian law and massive human rights violations as Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to act with absolute impunity, in contempt of the law and the Council's authority.

Our civilians, including the most vulnerable—children, women, refugees, displaced and disabled persons, as well as humanitarian and medical personnel—continue to be directly, deliberately, systematically and violently targeted by the occupying forces, as do civilian structures, including homes, hospitals and schools. Palestinian civilians continue to be killed, injured or forcibly displaced on a daily basis. In the past year the Israeli occupying forces have killed more than 300 civilians and injured more than 30,000 people, many permanently disabled, with more than 140 amputees in one year. Humanitarian assistance intended to address protection needs continues to be impeded and obstructed through access and movement restrictions imposed by the occupation, most severely through its inhumane, illegal and suffocating blockade of the Gaza Strip. Even the protective presence of unarmed civilian observers is denied, as we witnessed with Israel's termination, earlier this year, of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron.

Our reality under this illegal and inhumane occupation is one in which no one and nowhere are safe and the security and well-being of our civilians are under constant threat. And yet, our continuous pleas for protection continue to go unanswered, deepening the decades-long protection crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The consequences have been tragic and severe for our people, for the prospects for a peaceful solution and for the viability of multilateralism and the international system. When we meet in the Chamber and reaffirm the rules of protection and the laws of war and when we speak of noble principles and commitments, yet do nothing to uphold them, we must realize that someone, somewhere—actually thousands, in so many places around the world—suffers gravely because of that negligence.

It is time to implement United Nations resolutions and fulfil legal obligations, including the inviolable obligation to respect and ensure respect for the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War in all circumstances. As we approach the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions this August, let that be our solemn commitment and objective. We urge the international community to shore up the political will and courage to act immediately and without selectivity to protect human lives and to peacefully and justly resolve the conflicts plaguing our world, including in Palestine.

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

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), comprising Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and my own country, Viet Nam.

Twenty years have passed since the protection of civilians in armed conflict was first placed on the Security Council's agenda. Considerable progress has been achieved in the normative and deliverable framework, with 9 resolutions, 13 presidential statements, many general debates and over 100 meetings of the informal expert group on the protection of civilians. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including those mentioned in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2019/373). ASEAN therefore commends the Indonesian presidency for convening this timely open debate and would like to make the following observations.

First, every State has the primary responsibility to protect its civilians. The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a well-established obligation in international humanitarian law that has been further strengthened. However, the compliance of parties to armed conflicts with the laws governing armed conflict is variable. As such, ASEAN joins others in calling on all parties to armed conflict to enhance respect for the law on the conduct of hostilities. The protection of civilians in armed conflict must be guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of host States.

Secondly, peace operations can contribute to the protection of civilians in certain cases, as long as they have a clear mandate and are properly equipped and backed with adequate resources. We note that 9 out of the 14 current peacekeeping missions authorized by the Security Council have a mandate to protect civilians. Much can be learned and improved from their experience, taking into consideration mission-specific particularities. The importance of training cannot be overemphasized and it should start at the national level in troop- and police-contributing countries, supported by the efforts of the United Nations and countries in the region.

Last but not least, the best way to protect civilians is by preventing conflict altogether. There is a lot of wisdom and plenty of lessons to be learned from peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy, from which we can all benefit.

As embodied in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, ASEAN is a people-centred, rules-based and peace-loving community. We adhere to the principles of international law governing the peaceful conduct of relations among States, including refraining from the threat or use of force, resolving differences and disputes by peaceful means, while strengthening confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy.

ASEAN's contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security has been constructive and consistent with the spirit of the Charter, particularly in consideration of the role of regional arrangements, as stipulated in Chapter VIII. We therefore call for the further strengthening of ASEAN-United Nations cooperation with a view to assisting Member States in training and sharing experiences, including through the various peacekeeping training centres of ASEAN member States. ASEAN also wishes to commend all personnel involved in the protection of civilians for their work. We affirm the joint commitment of ASEAN to the protection of civilians and to our continued participation in peace operations.

I will now speak in my national capacity.

As a country that has gone through many wars to secure its independence and sovereignty, we have experienced first-hand the suffering of the people and fully empathize with the plights of the civilian victims of armed conflicts around the world. We call on all parties to armed conflicts to strictly comply with their obligation to protect civilians under international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, notably resolutions 1894 (2009) and 2286 (2016). In that regard, the State should take effective measures to exercise its responsibility.

With regard to peace operations, while acknowledging their contribution to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, we stress the importance of making them more sensitive and responsive to local dynamics, and of the peacebuilding strategy's being tailored to the specific context of each conflict. Through their participation and inclusion in the process, the local people will also develop a sense of genuine ownership

of the process and build their capacity to protect themselves and prevent the escalation of the conflict.

Since 2014, Vietnamese peacekeepers have been sent to various conflict zones in Africa. In 2018, a second-level field hospital was dispatched to South Sudan to join the United Nations Mission in South Sudan mandate, which includes the protection of civilians. We attach great importance to predeployment training in international humanitarian law for our peacekeepers and have adopted a policy of zero tolerance for sexual violence and abuse.

In conclusion, we support the Security Council's efforts to continue focusing on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts as one of its agenda priorities.

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

Mr. Ghafoorzai (Afghanistan): At the outset, we wish to commend the Indonesian presidency for holding today's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Twenty years have passed since the inclusion of the protection of civilians focus in the agenda of the Security Council, yet millions of peoples across the world still face conflict-related challenges. That means innocent lives lost, families left in grief and enormous humanitarian consequences in the form of loss of property, displacement and lack of basic necessities, such as food, water and electricity.

For Afghanistan, the meaning of protection is broad and comprehensive, entailing not only physical protection but also human security. Civilians continue to bear the cost of the decades-long imposed conflict in our country. The Taliban and its affiliate terrorist groups have continued their attacks on all segments of Afghan society — ordinary Afghans, religious figures and journalists. They also attack public infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and religious sites. When they do, they spare no one their brutality. Based on the quarterly report of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Taliban attacks from January to March 2019 resulted in almost 700 civilian casualties. They have resorted to all means and tactics, including launching attacks from public places and compounds, civilian homes and mosques, and they have used women and children as human shields.

This month alone, during the holy month of Ramadan — a time of spiritual renewal and reflection

to better one's life and advance peace, harmony and solidarity in society — new attacks by these groups occurred in different parts of the country. A few weeks ago, in Ghazni province, a Taliban-planted improvised explosive device killed eight children, while another such attack in Farah province left many wounded. These events are a manifestation of the gross violation and disregard of international humanitarian law and fundamental Islamic values.

Sadly, we have also seen a rise in the deliberate targeting of humanitarian personnel and infrastructure in different parts of the country. This month we witnessed Taliban attacks on two aid organizations in Kabul—Counterpart International and CARE—killing 15 people, including aid workers and civilians. The group vowed that the attacks would not be their last on aid organizations operating in Afghanistan. They are doing whatever they can to disrupt the normal functioning of humanitarian agencies and organizations in the country.

We strongly condemn all attacks against civilians, infrastructure and humanitarian personnel in Afghanistan as a violation of international humanitarian law. We call on the Council to take appropriate action to end such atrocities. Continued Taliban attacks come at a time when the people of Afghanistan and the international community extended another opportunity to the group to give up terror for peace. Where Afghans have made immense sacrifices to achieve peace and prosperity, the Taliban have responded with the same old approach: violence, killings and destruction. This further affirms the need for a careful collaborative approach in the context of ongoing peace efforts to end the current conflict in the country. Any eventual outcome to peace talks should come with clear and decisive guarantees for a just and lasting peace that will conform to the needs and expectations of all Afghans.

Our focus on the protection of civilians is being pursued by various Government institutions and agencies as their highest priority. The Afghan security forces are defending our country and people against the dangerous threats of international terrorism and extremism. They are operating with professionalism, adhering to strict guidelines of rules of engagement and coordinating closely with international forces on counter-terrorism operations to avoid and prevent harm to civilian populations, schools, hospitals, medical facilities and other public infrastructure. These precautionary measures are also based on

presidential decrees and other directives from the security institutions. Any incident of collateral damage by our security forces are investigated thoroughly and with accountability.

Our protection measures also include a special focus on ensuring the protection and well-being of our children in society. To this end, we have signed a joint action plan with the United Nations, which is continuing to be steadily implemented. Various directives, laws and mechanisms have been issued to ensure the protection of children.

We all know that civilian protection can best be achieved by preventing conflicts. This requires a new organizational approach, addressing the immediate needs of civilians caught in conflict as well as the root causes and structural drivers of conflict in each given setting. We welcome the creation of the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations as important components of the Secretary-General's reform agenda. The role of the United Nations will remain vital in the context of international efforts to prevent the outbreak, exacerbation and continuation of conflicts around the world.

In conclusion, let us make sure that today's meeting builds on the important work of the Council to protect civilians in conflict. Our collective success in this endeavour means success in defending and promoting a fundamental principle of humanity.

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

Ms. Skåre (Norway): I take the floor on behalf of the Nordic countries: Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

Twenty years after the first Security Council debate on protection of civilians (S/PV.3980), civilians are still in the line of fire in armed conflicts across the world, not least due to the rise in urban conflicts, the proliferation of non-State armed groups and asymmetric warfare. I thank you the Indonesian presidency for convening this open debate on an issue that regrettably must remain of great concern to the Council.

Let me state the obvious. The civilian population is not a legitimate target. Attacks directed against civilian objects such as schools and hospitals must end, and schools and hospitals must not be used for military purposes. We are exasperated at the inadequate respect for international humanitarian law

and principles and the lack of respect for international human rights law shown by many parties to conflicts around the world. And yet we can and must take heed of the multiple ways in which we have progressed over the past 20 years. Resolution 2286 (2016) and the subsequent recommendations of the Secretary-General are examples of concrete progress on how to enhance protection of civilians. We welcome the report by the Secretary-General (S/2019/373), which identifies further practical measures.

Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict has received due attention as the heinous crime that it is — in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in landmark convictions by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and in multiple Security Council resolutions, most recently through the newly adopted resolution 2467 (2019). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General monitors, reports and raises awareness of sexual violence in conflict. Protection of civilians has become firmly embedded in mandates and activities of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Nevertheless, sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is often an unreported crime. There is a lack of support for victims, and perpetrators go unpunished. Norway, Iraq, Somalia, the United Arab Emirates, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs are hosting a conference today and tomorrow precisely to improve coordination and mobilize greater resources in the humanitarian response to sexual and gender-based violence. In these efforts, we must listen to those affected. Persons with disabilities are particularly at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, and women's participation and rights must be a priority.

The developments mentioned are no small feat. Still, they are not sufficient. We can and must do better.

First and most obviously, we must increase the United Nations capacity to prevent and solve conflicts. We must continue to strengthen United Nations mediation efforts, support the Organization's broader political and peacebuilding efforts and enhance the situational awareness of peacekeeping operations. In this regard, we welcome the revised peacekeeping-intelligence policy of the Department of Peace Operations.

Secondly, we need to enhance respect for international humanitarian law and principles and for international human rights law. For example, those

responsible for violations and abuses of international law against the Rohingya in Myanmar must be held to account. We must support national efforts and capacity to pursue justice and reparations in the wake of armed conflicts. Innovative initiatives such as the Safe Schools Declaration play an important role in strengthening the protection of civilians and civilian objects. The Safe Schools Declaration has now been signed by 89 countries, and we appreciate Spain hosting the third Safe Schools conference next week.

Thirdly, the Security Council needs to maintain the issue of medical care on its agenda and strongly underline the seriousness of attacks on medical-care facilities and denial of access, as suggested by the recommendations of the Arria Formula meeting on protecting medical care in armed conflict held in December last year. The Council should, to a greater degree, consider issues relating to the protection of medical care in country resolutions and mission mandates.

In conclusion, we must constantly stand up and say that medical-care facilities and civilians are not legitimate targets.

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

Ms. Pereira Sotomayor (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Republic of Indonesia for convening this important debate. The protection of civilians in armed conflict must remain an overarching objective of the Security Council, along with the political will of the United Nations to implement international humanitarian law and human rights law.

My delegation thanks the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their briefings, as well as Secretary-General António Guterres for his report (S/2019/373), updated in May, which highlights the wide range of effects from which civilian populations continue to suffer. We regret that, even though that item has been on the Council's agenda since 1999, the situation of immeasurable human and social destruction has not changed, and, even worse, that the suffering and tragedy of civilians persist.

Ecuador believes that the protection of civilians must be a rational, unwavering and firm commitment of the community of States and that the obligations based on the Geneva Conventions are permanent. My country attaches the greatest importance to the

protection of civilians in armed conflicts. It considers it inhumane that the main victims continue to be civilians, particularly women, children, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons and refugees. We have had international humanitarian law rules for more than half a century, but it is civilians who are affected by forced displacement, limitations of humanitarian assistance, attacks against medical and humanitarian personnel and sexual and gender-based violence.

In that regard, we appreciate the Security Council's decision to include and prioritize the protection of civilians in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, as in the case of nine missions. It is essential, however, that they respond to a realistic assessment of the situation on the ground and be allocated sufficient resources to ensure their effective implementation and support activities aimed at resolving conflicts by peaceful means. Nonetheless, as the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations has emphasized, the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with host Governments, which is why close cooperation and consultation with national authorities and field missions are important.

Ecuador also reiterates its deep concern that civilians are targeted by and subjected to indiscriminate attacks, violations and damage to or the unlawful destruction of civilian infrastructure, hospitals, schools, property and livelihoods of the population, and that those attacks are increasingly taking place in urban areas.

The humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons on civilian populations cannot be overlooked; that is why we saw the Santiago communiqué — adopted at the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting on Protecting Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, organized by the Government of Chile — as a valuable contribution. As those present have already heard, some countries, including Ecuador, endorsed the communiqué. The communiqué recognizes the need to prioritize the prevention of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and supports the preparation of an international political declaration that would enable and promote the best protection of civilians, mainly women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, in armed conflicts by preventing the use of long-range explosive weapons in populated areas.

Ecuador's migration policy takes a human rights approach and our legislation recognizes the same

rights for refugees as for Ecuadorian citizens, with a view to allowing people in that condition to exit the welfare system and become agents of development for the benefit of the society that welcomes them. With that experiment, we recognize the importance of finding political solutions to conflicts, the lack of which makes it difficult to realize opportunities for the safe and sustainable return of millions of internal refugees.

My country believes that the global compact on refugees, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 73/151 last year, offers an innovative and practical model for promoting solidarity and responsibility-sharing as a guarantee of the right to return. In that regard, it is an inevitable obligation to cite the situation of the Palestinian people and their seven decades of waiting.

Faced with that desolate humanitarian scenario, Ecuador wishes to acknowledge the excellent work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the international protection of refugees worldwide and highlight the humanitarian operations organized and carried out on behalf of 71.4 million refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced persons and stateless persons. We also acknowledge and reiterate our support for the extraordinary work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing assistance to a total of 6.02 million Palestinian refugees, according to figures in its report of 1 January 2018.

Allow me to conclude by pointing out that crimes against civilians should not go unpunished, regardless of who commits them, where they are committed and when they occur. The lack of accountability continues to victimize civilians, destroys the credibility of the international community's ability to act and foments disregard for the law. In that regard, we agree with the Secretary-General's view that it is urgent to adopt more effective, robust, systematic, universal and coherent approaches to ensure accountability for the commission of those serious crimes and respond to the need to provide reparations for serious violations.

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

Mr. Almanzlawiy (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Indonesian presidency on steering wisely the work of the Security Council for this month. We also thank you, Sir, for convening this important meeting.

This year coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. My country continues to urge the international community to take a united and comprehensive approach to protecting civilians and keeping them at a distance from armed conflict. The contemporary reality of a world of successive and continuing conflicts causes suffering and harm to civilians and innocent people, depriving them of the most basic rights of life. Some conflicts drive children into combat, depriving them of their fundamental right to education and to be in school, and innocent people of the basic rights of life. We therefore call on the Security Council to operationalize its relevant resolutions, which must deter violators of international humanitarian law.

The change in the nature of conflicts requires ongoing adaptations to protect the lives of civilians. For example, the Israeli siege of Gaza represents total disregard for the principle of protecting civilians and their most fundamental rights. The theft of food in Yemen by Houthi coup militias also subjects civilians to the threat of famine. I would like to clarify that any attack on vital facilities in populated areas represents direct and clear disregard of the lives of civilians.

We call on the Council and the international community to work together to find a shared perspective on protecting civilians in armed conflicts of all kinds. We also call for preserving the neutrality status of innocent civilians, and on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities by taking a strong position against the Houthi militias supported by Iran, which target vital areas populated by innocent people with ballistic missiles and drones in cities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in gross violation of international humanitarian law and the Council resolutions.

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

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to take the floor in order to clarify the reference to Srebrenica in our statement to the Security Council this morning. The United Kingdom is clear that the Srebrenica massacre was an act of genocide, as confirmed by the judgments of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice.

The meeting rose at 7.10 p.m.