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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Kariuki	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Spasse
	Brazil	Mr. Moretti
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault
	Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Ms. Gatt
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Ms. Shaheen
	United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

United Nations peacekeeping operations

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

United Nations peacekeeping operations

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations; Lieutenant General Mohan Subramanian, Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan; Lieutenant General Otávio Rodrigues De Miranda Filho, Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz, Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

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

This session is intended to be as interactive as possible, so we look forward to taking questions from Council members for the Force Commanders. Of course, in order for us to get through such an interactive meeting, I would encourage members to be brief and precise with their questions. There is no need to repeat a question if another member has already asked it. I would also ask members to be mindful that we have another meeting immediately following this one.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: It is my pleasure to introduce this Security Council meeting on the occasion of the conference of the Heads of United Nations Military Components here in New York. I will be brief, as the purpose of today's meeting is for members to hear from the Force Commanders. I thank the presidency of the United Kingdom for organizing this interactive discussion. It will focus on the role of the military components in the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations, building on the recent open debate of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict during Protection of Civilians Week (see S/PV.9327).

This annual gathering of the Force Commanders of our peacekeeping operations is a very important occasion. It provides an opportunity for in-depth

exchanges between them and diverse actors at United Nations Headquarters, with a view to continually improving the impact of United Nations peacekeeping. This week they have engaged on a variety of topics, ranging from mandate implementation to peacekeepers' safety and security and from reflections on the women and peace and security agenda to leveraging technology to counter emerging threats, as well as cooperation with host nations, the importance of strategic communications, the continuing efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and initiatives to reduce the environmental footprint, to name just a few. They have also had an opportunity to remain closely apprised of the major discussions and expectations of peacekeeping in the Council, as well as in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the Fifth Committee and other bodies. Ultimately, our collective efforts to enhance the impact of peacekeeping in the field in the framework of the Action for Peacekeeping Plus strategy are more important than ever.

The topic that the Security Council has chosen for today's discussion — the role of military components in the protection of civilians through prevention and response — is a key one for the importance of peace operations, and I hope our meeting will be most informative and beneficial to all of us. Members will shortly hear from the Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Lieutenant General Mohan Subramanian; the Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lieutenant General Otávio Rodrigues De Miranda Filho; and the Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz. I am sure that their experience and insights will be very useful to the Council in its work.

Lastly, on this occasion, through the Heads of military components who are present, I want to recognize the work accomplished every day by all military women and men serving in United Nations peace operations in very diverse contexts for the cause of peace. I would particularly like to salute the peacekeepers serving in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali as the Mission begins its withdrawal in conditions that remain challenging, including regarding security. I thank the 125 Member States that provide uniformed personnel to United Nations peace operations. I also want to pay tribute to

the men and women who have fallen in service to the United Nations. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten. It continues to drive and inspire us in our continued efforts for the cause of peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Lacroix for his introduction.

I now give the floor to Lieutenant General Subramanian.

Lieutenant General Subramanian: I wish everyone a very good morning. I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the perspectives of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), particularly on how the force conducts its protection-of-civilians operations.

Without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the Government of South Sudan for the protection of its own citizens, the protection of civilians remains the overarching priority for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan in furthering the implementation of the mandate. In pursuing UNMISS's whole-of-mission strategy, the force conducts its protection-of-civilians operations in close cooperation with the police and substantive sections of the Mission, and in partnership with international partners, humanitarian actors, the United Nations country team, the communities we serve and the host Government and its army and police.

I shall brief the Council on certain practical aspects of protection-of-civilians operations, conducted by the UNMISS force. It ranges from engagement of the authorities of the Government of South Sudan, including that of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, at the national and local levels, to enlist their proactive actions to prevent conflicts. It includes pre-planned deployment in certain areas, which are identified as conflict-prone, dynamic deployment of temporary operating bases and long- and short-duration patrols in locations in which early warning is used for imminent conflicts. It includes deployment of quick-reaction forces teams for the defence of identified protection-of-civilians camps and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and sites in the country. It includes active patrolling of our area of responsibility in order to show presence, to inspire confidence and develop and promote a sense of security among the population.

Where we do not have requisite early warning and clashes take place, we also react through strong patrols and with a firm response to those conflicts and clashes

that take place, adopting all or either of the options that I will talk about now, based on the situation and available resources. That can be to deploy in or near the conflict location; interpose or intervene between clashing armed factions, segregate them and contain the conflict; deploy to protect civilians, who, in large numbers, may be fleeing from the conflict zone and guide them to the nearest UNMISS base, wherein we can protect them better and start humanitarian support; or visualize what is the next immediate objective of the attackers and deploy there to prevent an escalation of the conflict.

Very often, it is a decision dilemma for the commanders on the ground to adopt some, all or perhaps one of the options, depending on the situation and resources available. We constantly train our ground commanders to take those decisions most efficiently by keeping the fundamental principle in mind, which is to select the option that gives the opportunity to protect the maximum number of civilians. We ensure that leadership visits are conducted before and during the conflict in order to fine-tune the conflict, enhance the morale of soldiers, inspire confidence, engage local leaders to prevent an escalation of the conflict and ensure dynamic and proactive actions. We also continuously endeavour to adapt the mindset of all our soldiers in tune with our mandate.

Conflict prevention is definitely the best method of ensuring the protection of civilians. However, the impact of how our conflict prevention methods have worked is very difficult to assess. It is an intangible aspect and difficult to measure or perceive. However, it is that very impact that we constantly strive to strengthen. With that in view, we continuously conduct reviews of our actions before and during conflicts and also receive guidance from United Nations Headquarters to facilitate the fine-tuning of our protection-of-civilians efforts.

We attach considerable importance to the salience of the protection of a maximum number of civilians. For example, during the conflict between September and November 2022 in Upper Nile state, we took the option of protecting the village of Kodok, which we thought was the next logical objective of the attackers and where the maximum number of civilians would congregate. We reinforced that location. We guided the fleeing civilians from the zone of conflict in the neighbourhood, got them to gather at Kodok and protected them. I would like to think that we thereby

prevented the attack and protected the lives of more than 18,200 IDPs who had gathered near our base.

In the case of the Greater Pibor administrative area, where a conflict broke out in December 2022, we took the option of protecting fleeing civilians from that conflict zone, protecting them and getting them to safety at the nearest UNMISS base, which was at Pibor. We strengthened that base and ensured the protection of, again, approximately 18,000 civilians.

In the case of a clash that broke out in the Malakal protection-of-civilians camp very recently, in the month of June, our effort was to drive a wedge between the clashing communities. Our quick reaction force team interposed itself between the two warring communities and contained the conflict and the casualties. As I said, that sort of option for a protection-of-civilians response is chosen based on the salience of which option provides us with the opportunity to protect the maximum number of civilians.

Enhancing freedom of movement is a continuous priority action for UNMISS to ensure that we are able to dynamically respond to protection-of-civilians challenges, for which we have set up mechanisms at the national and local levels for ensuring freedom of movement on land and by river and air. We follow up systematically with the South Sudanese authorities for every access denial that we encounter.

It is not necessarily only by the use of arms and military means that we ensure physical protection of civilians in South Sudan. In a peculiar situation in Unity state in South Sudan, the state witnessed unprecedented flooding that the country had not seen in the past six decades. More than 177,000 displaced persons congregated in the town of Bentiu, which is the capital of Unity state. There, our protection-of-civilians actions took the form of building a 25-kilometre dike system of between six feet and nine feet, and continuously monitoring it and preventing the threat to life from any accidental flooding.

On 8 and 9 October 2022, a breach was discovered by one of our patrols — a breach of 21 metres by nine metres — from which the water was entering the IDP site in great force, such that even heavy engineering equipment could not reach the breach. However, all UNMISS personnel at that location, military and civilian, as well as the communities, stood together in a human chain, ensured they reached the breach, filled sandbags and closed the breach, in an action that I

estimate saved at least 40,000 infirm, old and mobility-impaired internally displaced persons in the camp.

With those few aspects to highlight, I end with the assurance to the Security Council that UNMISS stands in full earnestness and sincerity to ensure the implementation of its mandate. It also stands in sincerity to correct its mistakes in every operation and improve its responses further, in tune with the overall guidance of United Nations Headquarters and the Security Council.

The President: I thank Lieutenant General Subramanian.

I now give the floor to Lieutenant General Rodrigues de Miranda Filho.

Lieutenant General Rodrigues de Miranda Filho: As the Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), it is an honour to have the opportunity to share with the Council some aspects regarding the protection of civilians in our area of responsibility. There are many current and evolving trends regarding threats to civilians in the MONUSCO context, and I would like to emphasize and discuss some of them with members.

At the State level, our main concern is regarding the weak State, the weak capacity of security actors and the weak justice system. The level of impunity is still high. In a general context, our concerns are the number of illegal armed groups present in the area of responsibility; the deliberate targeting of civilians on ethnic grounds and opportunistic actions, for example, abductions by the Allied Democratic Forces prey on the weakest community; the high number of displaced persons who are vulnerable when in internally displaced persons (IDP) sites; IDP site attacks; inter-community rivalry that leads to a cycle of retaliatory violence, for example the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* versus *Zaire*; the exploitation of civilians for monetary purposes, labour or sexual and gender-based violence; and the manipulation of the population through the information domain.

To prevent and respond to threats of physical violence against civilians, we consider the three tiers of protection of civilians.

Regarding tier 1 — engagement and dialogue — providing and creating a safe physical space means dialogue can take place at the community

level in volatile environments. We also advocate for the protection of civilians with political actors at the national and provincial levels. Presence leads to prevention. That is arguably the most important way for military peacekeepers to prevent violence. It includes the provision of area security and/or buffer zones.

Framework operations prevent and respond to threats in the vicinity of vulnerable communities to deter threats. Response operations provide armed forces to deter or neutralize emerging threats. Targeted offensive operations focus on disrupting armed group activities and isolating them from the civilian population. Joint operations, whenever possible, provide a local security presence to all operations. Enablers make the difference. Being able to deploy air assets, for example, is essential. A swift response is a critical part of any effective early warning and response mechanism.

A complex and dynamic operational landscape, including new threats such as misinformation and disinformation, has adversely affected MONUSCO's efforts to prevent and respond to threats against civilians.

The freedom of movement has been compromised by attacks on patrols and stoning. Linked to the freedom of movement is the lack of access for, and attacks on, humanitarian actors. Manipulation of information through the digital domain has eroded the support of the population, making it much more difficult to carry out our patrols for the protection of civilians. The main question is — how can we ensure that peacekeepers are adequately trained and equipped to meet such challenges?

First, we must understand that we are going to operate in a hostile environment, with a high possibility of armed confrontation. Keeping that reality in mind, we must consider some significant points.

The posture of troop-contributing countries (TCCs) must be offensive in nature. The priority is the protection of civilians, not self-protection. One of the main reasons that MONUSCO lost the confidence of the population was exactly because some of our TCCs were not proactive and effective enough. They conducted a lot of protection-of-civilians operations, but in the wrong place or at the wrong time in order to avoid contact with the illegal armed groups. They thought that they could win the minds and hearts of the population investing in civil-military cooperation activities. But, in fact, under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, in a peacekeeping mission, the best and only way to achieve

that and protect the mission at the same time is to be proactive and effective in the protection of civilians and showing clearly that the mission is truly committed to their protection.

In addition, the equipment and weapons must be modern and compatible with the needs on the ground. During my visit to the 33 bases in my area of operations, I realized that some TCCs were not well equipped for that kind of peacekeeping operation — some weapons were old, some equipment was not suitable for the operating environment and some ammunition was even unserviceable. When facing an illegal armed group like the Movement du 23 mars, which is almost a regular army, one must have weaponry and high-end equipment in order to be effective and, at the same time, ensure greater security and protection for one's own troops.

Military training should emphasize offensive operations. It is necessary to prepare the mindset of the troops as soon as possible, even along the green and blue training, before the deployment. The militaries must know that they are going to a war environment.

Bases should be prepared to face attacks by armed groups. The implementation of the report by Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz entitled *Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers* is mandatory. We cannot accept to lose our Blue Helmets because we, as United Nations, are failing in the improvement of the defensibility of our bases on the field.

Military personnel must be professional, preferably with previous experience. TCCs must avoid newly recruited military. Self-confidence comes only with experience. In a mission under Chapter VII, the posture and the self-confidence of troops makes a significant difference in the result of the implementation of the mandate.

With regard to language, language classes should be provided before deployment, when possible, for TCC members who do not speak the language of the mission or country.

Collaboration across military, civilian and police components must be emphasized.

The leadership of the commanders is the last, but most important aspect regarding peacekeeping operations under Chapter VII. One weak commander can compromise the full contingent.

The roles of the force in ensuring the integrated, coordinated and whole-of-mission approach to a protection-of-civilians mandate include the integration of the civilian pillars in all force activities; the prioritization of relative threats to the protection of civilians; training, coordination and support to local security forces; and collaboration and planning with regional security forces.

Member States can support the enhanced protection of civilians in this challenging context by ensuring missions have the military enablers they need, demanding the required attitude and robust posture of TCCs in predeployment training, and investing in helping missions to improve data and use of technology. The motto “enabled by technology and informed by data” is a key element incorporated in the new United Nations protection-of-civilians policy.

In addition, Member States can demand more females in substantive roles in peacekeeping missions — both in TCCs and force headquarters. It is critical to increase the number of women soldiers and officers in the bases, as women civilians are more likely to talk with women peacekeepers on issues related to the protection of civilians. Investing in protection-of-civilians units within missions is also important. Such units can better serve a mission if they are adequately staffed, with sufficient staff for an officer in each Field Office. Moreover, we must promote accountability for inaction in the face of threats to civilians.

Finally, I would like to thank the Security Council for allowing me to share my main concerns, as MONUSCO Force Commander, regarding the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate.

The President: I thank Lieutenant General Rodrigues De Miranda Filho for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz.

Major General Lázaro Sáenz: It is an honour to brief the Security Council on the protection of civilians. This is one of the key areas of the Secretary-General’s Action for Peacekeeping initiative and among the most central mandates of United Nations peace operations.

At the outset, however, it is with deep regret that I convey my condolences to the Government of Ghana for the death of one of its peacekeepers in a tragic traffic accident today.

The 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah had a devastating impact on civilians on both sides. In the aftermath of the conflict, with a new mandate and additional resources, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) became one of the six current United Nations peacekeeping missions with a protection-of-civilians mandate.

Resolution 1701 (2006) from August 2006 authorizes UNIFIL to take all necessary action to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities and without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon.

UNIFIL is a traditional peacekeeping operation, operating under a mandate under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations. Such a structure, as well as the operational context, set the implementation of a protection-of-civilians mandate apart from large multidimensional peacekeeping missions.

Currently, in UNIFIL’s area of operation, there is no clear identified imminent threat of physical violence to civilians. It is in recognition of an existing latent threat that UNIFIL’s protection-of-civilians efforts are currently focused on prevention and consolidating normative standards. The prevention aspect is at the heart of UNIFIL’s activities and is achieved through robust deployment across the area of operations, situational awareness, as well as dialogue and engagement with the parties to the conflict. In that regard, UNIFIL has established a tripartite forum as a key confidence-building and conflict management tool. The forum, which I personally chair, is the only venue where Lebanese and Israeli forces are in the same room in addressing security concerns. The tripartite forum is the cornerstone of the mission’s coordination and liaison mechanisms, which have repeatedly demonstrated their utility as a vital platform for deconfliction, confidence-building and conflict prevention between parties that remain technically at war.

Notably, the trust vested in those mechanisms was demonstrated with cross-Blue Line rocket fire on 6 April followed by Israeli air strikes the following day. The parties were able to pass messages through me to deconflict, avoid misunderstandings and facilitate the safe travel of the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL to the launch sites to prevent further rocket fire.

On a daily basis, UNIFIL’s liaison branch has teams of unarmed observers deployed north and south

of the Blue Line. They maintain regular contact with the Israel Defense Forces and Lebanese Armed Forces on the ground during routine activities by the parties along the Blue Line and are a vital communication channel at times of tension. That helps avoid misunderstandings and miscalculations.

UNIFIL, like other missions, has recently been fighting an unprecedented rise in misinformation/disinformation campaigns. Those have the potential not only to create tensions, but also to undermine the image and effectiveness of the mission, including by contributing to a decline in the local community's acceptance, indispensable for the safety of UNIFIL peacekeepers, as well as access and freedom of movement through all our area of operations.

Regarding the provision of physical protection of civilians, UNIFIL is deployed with a robust and visible presence. That includes more than 450 daily operational activities, conducted both independently and in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, and throughout the whole area of operations. UNIFIL also assists the Lebanese Armed Forces in keeping the area of operations free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons through coordinated operations. However, UNIFIL faces challenges in accessing all sites of interest, including unauthorized firing ranges. All UNIFIL personnel, both uniformed and civilian, are engaged in the establishment of a protective environment in south Lebanon and, through civil affairs and civil-military cooperation activities, help build resilient communities.

Our protection-of-civilians mandate is also informed by the women and peace and security and youth, peace and security agendas. Women and youth are essential partners in all tiers of the protection-of-civilians policy, even if their participation is not always as easily ensured as we would wish. On our side, UNIFIL ensures full participation of female peacekeepers in its operational activities. Women play an essential role in improving all aspects of our operations and facilitating access to local communities to maintain awareness of specific protection-of-civilians concerns. Female peacekeepers also serve as role models in UNIFIL's efforts to support Lebanon in implementing its first national action plan on women and peace and security.

I wish to emphasize the importance of a whole-of-mission approach in ensuring coordinated, cohesive and effective protection-of-civilians efforts. But I also want

to be clear, as it is critical to manage expectations: the type of conflict that could reignite between Lebanon and Israel would likely lead to significant civilian casualties, despite the mission's preparedness and efforts. It is all the more important to invest as much as possible in prevention — the best possible protection-of-civilians strategy — and work to address the root causes of the conflict. As Council members are aware, the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process has the primary responsibility to support the parties to achieve a permanent ceasefire. That is the best guarantee for the protection of civilians in both countries. In that, the support of the members of the Council, collectively and individually, will remain primordial for us.

The President: I thank Major General Lázaro Sáenz for his briefing.

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

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I would like to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix, as well as the Force Commanders of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), for their briefings and for the exceptional work they do under difficult circumstances for the cause of peace. We also acknowledge the United Kingdom's leadership in convening this annual meeting on peacekeeping in support of an important aspect of mandates relating to the protection of civilians and the role of the military components in preventing and responding to threats of physical violence.

With more than 1 million men and women, from 125 countries, deployed by the United Nations to about 72 peacekeeping operations since 1948, peacekeeping has remained a preferred tool for the maintenance of international peace and security over the past 75 years.

As one of the leading troop- and police-contributing countries, Ghana has contributed more than 80,000 troops and police personnel since its participation in the United Nations Operation in the Congo, in 1960, and currently, with about 2,760 troops deployed in 9 out of the 12 existing peacekeeping operations, we can attest to the important difference United Nations peacekeepers continue to make in protecting civilians in conflict settings.

In that context, and mindful of the fact that 6 out of the 12 peacekeeping missions have a protection-of-civilians mandate, Ghana has identified the protection of civilians as one of five priority themes for the upcoming peacekeeping ministerial meeting in Accra. We look forward to the discussions and pledges of ways by which we can enhance our collective ambition to prevent and better respond to threats against civilians in mission areas.

In keeping with the request of the presidency for short and interactive statements, I will focus my remarks on the three key issues raised in the concept note.

First, in terms of current and evolving trends of threats to civilians in the peacekeeping context, we note, among others threats, the continued targeting of civilian populations to spread fear and nominal control through the increasing use of improvised explosive devices against civilians and peacekeepers, the pursuit of disinformation campaigns to displace populations into areas before attacks and the adoption of terror as a tactic by groups to dissuade local populations from cooperating with national authorities in their efforts to ensure peace. We would be interested in understanding any specific examples from the Force Commanders where intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities have been integrated with other technological and strategic communication tools to mobilize local populations to help prevent attacks by terrorists and armed groups, against the backdrop of concerns over limited resources and stretched-out mandates in complex settings.

Secondly, the protection-of-civilians mandate, which has grown over the years from a minor component to a major one, remains important to the success of any mission. While the key role of the military component in the protection of civilians cannot be overemphasized, its integration with other components is also essential. In that regard, we want to better understand how effective the experience has been with the whole-of-mission approach in implementing the three tiers of protection, namely, physical protection, dialogue and engagement, and the establishment of a protective environment, especially in the context of MONUSCO. Also, where prevention and response fail and civilians suffer attacks and abuse from armed groups, how have missions gone about rebuilding trust with the local populations and the host Governments?

Finally, cognizant of the complex landscape of present peacekeeping and the adverse impact of malicious disinformation campaigns, we would want to find out from the briefers their assessment of the extent to which the implementation of strategic communication with good-postured presence and engagement with the local communities has contributed to the effective prevention of physical violence against civilian populations.

In concluding, we believe that a justifiable show of force goes a long way to deter armed and other elements from causing harm to civilians. We encourage the deployment of all relevant military assets, including the engagement platoon, for enhancing early warning capabilities and maintaining effective communication among military units to be able to respond decisively and swiftly to any planned attacks on civilians. We also encourage the provision of adequate medical support and a protective environment for facilitating the work of other agencies in the event of an attack.

As we heard from the briefers today, regional forces can also be effective partners and are critical early responders in ensuring the protection of civilians. We would need to converge our views on how best the Security Council can support their efforts. We remain convinced that the United Nations peacekeeping operations of tomorrow will have prospects for a positive impact on the protection of civilians, including through the prioritization and expansion of the concept to embrace the full range of a mission's political and programmatic capacities and the deployment of data and modern technology.

In conclusion, we pay tribute to all uniformed personnel, and, in particular, to all those who have lost their lives in the quest for peace, including the Ghanaian soldier in UNIFIL who was involved in a road accident today. May their souls continue to rest in peace.

Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the United Kingdom presidency's convening of today's meeting on a major function of many peacekeeping operations: the protection of civilians. I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General and the three Force Commanders for their briefings. I would like to pay tribute to the Blue Helmets who, at the risk of their lives, work in the field every day to advance the cause of peace.

Let me focus on two points.

First, the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host State, and peacekeeping operations take place with the consent of the host State, while respecting its sovereignty. Peacekeeping operations do not take the place of the host State. Peace operations depend on a reliable, good-faith partnership with local authorities. Accordingly, France welcomes the growing cooperation between the Central African authorities and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, and we hope that this dynamic will continue.

Peace operations are facing increasingly hostile environments. It is imperative that impediments to mission activities and contingent rotations cease. Freedom of movement for missions must be guaranteed. The manipulation of information — which has increased, particularly against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, but also against the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) — is detrimental to the implementation of civilian-protection mandates and must come to an end.

The protection of civilians must also be the primary objective where peace operations work alongside regional players. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, regional forces must coordinate more closely with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to protect human lives. The protection of civilians must also be at the heart of African peace operations, for which France supports mandatory funding.

Secondly, to protect civilians effectively, peace operations must be equipped with appropriate resources. The Security Council must give peace operations clear, prioritized and achievable mandates. The Secretary-General reiterates this point in the guidelines set forth in his New Agenda for Peace. These mandates can only be implemented effectively if Blue Helmets are trained prior to deployment. Contingent members must also be able to speak the local language, and they must be equipped with appropriate equipment. For this reason, France supports the deployment of new technologies within operations, as they will contribute to both the protection of civilians and the safety of the Blue Helmets.

Protecting civilians requires a proactive approach from contingents, with measures to anticipate, neutralize or mitigate threats. A robust posture — and offensive

actions, when mandated — must be complemented by early-warning and response mechanisms, which implies integrated planning and conduct of operations to strengthen coordination between military, police and civilian components. Continuity in the protection of civilians must also be prepared in the context of transitions, as is the case for MONUSCO, so that the gains made can be preserved.

Finally, attention must be paid to the specific needs of women and children. To this end, peace operations must work more closely with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Blue Helmets must also set an example. France reiterates its commitment to the effective implementation of the zero-tolerance policy towards Blue Helmets and civilian personnel who are guilty of acts of sexual aggression or abuse.

Much remains to be done to protect civilians. France will continue to play its part, including through the 700 personnel it deploys to peace operations, in particular in UNIFIL. In partnership with the International Organization of la Francophonie, France will continue to train soldiers of many nationalities to strengthen the French-speaking capacity of the Blue Helmets. In line with the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, we must redouble our efforts aimed at making peacekeeping more agile and efficient.

Allow me to address two questions to our briefers.

First, how can we take greater advantage of new technologies to enhance the protection of civilians? And secondly, how can peace operations strengthen the host State's capacity to protect civilians to preserve the gains made after a transition?

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate.

I would like to begin by thanking the Deputy Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Lacroix, and the three Force Commanders, Generals Subramanian, Rodrigues de Miranda Filho and Lázaro Sáenz, for their briefings. In addition to these three Generals, I would like to thank all the Heads of Mission and Force Commanders, who are doing a remarkable job, often in very difficult conditions. I would also like to express our condolences to the Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), to the Government of Ghana and above all to the family of the peacekeeper who died in an accident this morning.

Unfortunately, civilians still represent the vast majority of victims of armed conflict, and their protection is therefore more necessary than ever, as well as more difficult than ever, as we have just heard. The protection of civilians is also one of Switzerland's priorities on the Security Council. The New Agenda for Peace provides us with the conceptual framework for considering how peacekeeping missions can further strengthen the protection of civilians in future. This is also our main question: how can we, States Members of the United Nations and also members of the Security Council, support this reflection as part of the discussions we have on the New Agenda for Peace in the coming months?

I would like to mention three avenues in this regard.

First, protecting the civilian population is one of the primary tasks of peacekeeping missions. This priority must be reflected in the allocation and use of available capacities and resources. The protection of civilians must be the subject of a comprehensive, integrated approach involving all the military, police and civilian components of a mission. The focus should not be on reacting to acts committed against civilians, but, as the Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan emphasized, on preventing such acts. That said, even when a United Nations mission is present, the fundamental responsibility for protecting the civilian population lies with the Government of the host country.

The root causes of conflict and the political, socioeconomic, gender and other dimensions must be taken into account right from the initial planning phase of a mission, as stressed by the UNIFIL Force Commander. In this context, the presence of protection-of-civilian advisers on mission staffs is particularly important to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach between the various components and external partners. In addition, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law must be an integral part of peacekeeper training, as this is everyone's responsibility.

Secondly, beyond the specificities of each mission, it is important to define and systematically implement common standards for the protection of civilians, including against gender-based violence. The presence of all Force Commanders in New York today is an opportunity for the Council to draw on their extensive

experience to establish best practices and ensure that they are disseminated and applied across all missions.

The protection of civilians must also be guaranteed during transitional phases. In this respect, the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali must under no circumstances lead to a deterioration in the condition of civilians in the country: the Malian Government must immediately ensure that the functions in this area for which the Mission was responsible continue to be carried out.

Thirdly, and finally, strategic mission communication also contributes to the protection of civilians. As we have heard, misinformation and hate speech weaken and undermine efforts. Accordingly, as we heard at last week's briefing on artificial intelligence (see S/PV.9381), new technologies have interesting potential. By helping to better understand the human environment, such technologies bolster early warnings and therefore the prevention of violence against civilians. In that context, we would like to ask the Force Commanders how they see in concrete terms the future use within their Missions of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, in order to counter disinformation and improve the protection of civilians, while at the same time ensuring that the risks linked to their use are minimized.

In conclusion, we would like to remind everyone that the protection of civilians is an obligation under international law in all situations of armed conflict. As a long-standing advocate of international humanitarian law, Switzerland will continue to work for its promotion and strict application.

Mrs. Ngyema Ndong (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Force Commanders of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for their informative briefings. I would also like to pay heartfelt tribute to the Blue Helmets deployed in the field.

This meeting provides us with an opportunity to assess in clear terms the strengths and weaknesses of peacekeeping operations and to address them with concrete, adequate and specific solutions in order to respond effectively to new security threats and better ensure the protection of civilians. Peacekeeping

operations are a cornerstone of the United Nations protection-of-civilians strategy and crucial to fostering dialogue and reconciliation in countries in crisis situations. However, the complexity of new threats to international peace and security, such as those posed by climate change, the predatory exploitation of natural resources, disinformation, terrorism, violent extremism, the impact of pandemics, the use by armed groups of explosive devices and lethal autonomous weapon systems, cyberwar and drones — to which we can even add the malicious use of artificial intelligence — can contribute to weakening the efforts of peacekeeping operations, especially their military components. It is therefore more critical than ever for the mandates conferred on our Blue Helmets to be more innovative and ambitious and less ambiguous so that they can adapt to the realities and hostilities in their theatres of operation. Moreover, the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his New Agenda for Peace call for such action.

The sudden departure of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali as the country continues to face major security challenges, as well as the continuing insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, should compel us to learn from past experience. In Gabon's view, more finely tuned mandates, combined with better preparation of military components during deployment — something that the MONUSCO Force Commander also just pointed out — will make it possible to improve missions' efficiency and above all, their ability to meet needs related to the protection of civilians. Furthermore, we must also listen to host countries and their populations, who long only for stability and peace.

We must also acknowledge that regional and subregional organizations are playing an increasingly crucial role. Africa's willingness to participate in resolving the security crises that are negatively affecting the continent is clear and has been demonstrated many times. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, United Nations-African Union cooperation is therefore a concrete solution in terms of conflict prevention and the management of new security challenges. We reiterate that sustainable financing of African Union-led peace support operations plays a major role in the maintenance of international peace and security. We must urgently build a partnership based on adequate and predictable funding, in line with the

proposals made by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2023/303).

In conclusion, as you wanted the nature of this meeting to be interactive, Sir, I would like to ask a few questions of the MONUSCO and UNMISS Force Commanders. MONUSCO is often a target of multifaceted attacks, of which some in particular are linked to disinformation. How does the Force Commander deal with that threat on the ground, especially in rural areas, in the context of building trust with local populations?

My second question is for the UNMISS Force Commander. Violence in the Sudan has forced refugees from South Sudan to return to their country, which is putting a strain on the security situation in a country that has already been weakened by its internal crises. How are his units adapting to that new reality, the influx of refugees, so that they can strengthen the protection of civilians, including in refugee camps?

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Force Commanders for their briefings. I also want to thank the Force Commanders and the peacekeepers under their command for their extraordinary service and sacrifice. They are carrying out their duties in very challenging circumstances, and I want to express my country's great appreciation for all that they do. Let me also offer my condolences to the Permanent Representative of Ghana and the people of Ghana on the death of the Ghanaian peacekeeper who died earlier today.

The United States would like to echo the comments expressed today underscoring that the protection of civilians requires a whole-of-mission effort to continually set conditions for a stable environment that can enable a political process to take hold. United Nations peacekeeping missions must work in concert through dialogue, engagement and the positioning of forces to protect vulnerable civilians. We recognize that it takes an entire mission team to facilitate the three tiers of action for protecting civilians, and we join others on the Security Council in urging for integrated, mission-wide planning that leads to solutions that advance the protection of civilians.

The protection of civilians should always be given priority in peacekeeping operations' implementation of their mandates. We recognize the challenges inherent in weighing the protection of civilians with the responsibility for maintaining the safety and

security of our peacekeepers, especially in dangerous operational environments. We acknowledge the fact that Force Commanders and subordinate leaders often weigh difficult decisions between the protection of civilians and the protection of peacekeepers on a daily basis. Sound leadership, with an eye to robust mandate implementation, is fundamental to our efforts in protecting civilians. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon continues to provide a comprehensive model for developing a protective environment through concerted dialogue and engagement among the concerned parties. The tripartite mechanism is an exceptional example of how our missions help to mitigate the risk of violent escalation in dangerous operating environments.

In South Sudan, we have been heartened that the violence seen in early June at the Malakal protection-of-civilians site has not escalated. We also appreciate efforts by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to stabilize the situation. We look forward to the release on 15 October of the United Nations external assessment of UNMISS's protection-of-civilians performance. UNMISS remains a critical player in providing security and stability in South Sudan. Likewise, we would like to recognize the efforts by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to ensure the implementation of its mandate to protect civilians and continue assisting the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in strengthening key governance, justice and security institutions, despite the worsening humanitarian crisis resulting from violence in the eastern part of the country. We also appreciate MONUSCO's logistics support to the Independent National Electoral Commission throughout the spring in transporting electoral materials for voter registration in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. The swift provision of that mandated support was critical to protecting civilians and ensuring their ability to participate in the electoral processes.

We emphasize that all mandated peacekeeping tasks that establish conditions for a protective environment should be implemented in a manner consistent with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Ultimately, the protection of civilians must be enshrined in political solutions to which United Nations peacekeeping strives to provide a bridge.

Mr. Spasse (Albania): I join my colleagues in expressing my condolences to Ghana on the loss of its

peacekeeper earlier today. I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Force Commanders of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for their valuable insights.

Albania supports the efforts of United Nations peacekeeping military components in preventing and resolving conflicts, safeguarding civilians and upholding peace. Their contribution to global peace and security, especially during times of war, uncertainty and crisis, is indispensable. However, the growing numbers of non-State armed groups, such as rebels, militias, criminal organizations and violent extremists, have added complexity to conflicts. That complexity poses challenges for peacekeepers to ensure their own safety. If peacekeepers are not protected, they cannot protect civilians. In that context, we applaud the critical efforts made by United Nations peacekeeping missions to protect civilians, particularly women and children who live in displaced persons camps.

To prevent violent conflict, all States must adhere to international humanitarian law, and Security Council members have a special responsibility in that regard. Strengthening the rule of law and societies' resistance to violent conflict is also vital. Despite increasing efforts, conflict prevention and response remain inadequate. Hence the need for enhanced collaboration between Member States and the United Nations to include the agencies, funds, programmes and other United Nations legislative bodies to develop and implement an integrated prevention strategy.

United Nations peacekeeping understands that the most effective and sustainable way of protecting civilians is to address the root causes of conflict and ensure stability, peace and security. Those goals can be attained by implementing early-warning systems and conflict-prevention initiatives and by taking steps to address misinformation and disinformation. The presence of United Nations peacekeeping missions in outlying areas provides them with first-hand knowledge, enabling them to interact and communicate with local communities. That interaction helps them gain insights into regional and national causes of conflict, which can contribute to enhancing early-warning systems. To achieve lasting peace, the relationship with the host nation must be inclusive and multifaceted.

In conclusion, we must continue to support and strengthen the efforts of United Nations peacekeeping missions in their vital role of preventing and responding to conflicts and to foster global peace and security.

I have a question for our military colleagues: how do they adapt their strategies and tactics to effectively engage in dialogue and relations with local actors, including armed groups, to prevent violence against civilians?

Ms. Gatt (Malta): We welcome the opportunity to meet with Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, and the Force Commanders of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for an interactive discussion on this important issue. We salute the work of peacekeepers and remember those who have been injured or lost their lives, and I also convey our condolences to Ghana for today's tragic accident.

Contemporary peacekeeping missions with protection-of-civilians mandates operate in challenging environments partly characterized by widespread armed-group violence against civilians, weak and abusive security forces and limited State authority. In relation to the United Nations policy on gender-responsive peacekeeping operations, we would appreciate hearing about how gender has been incorporated into operational staff work and tactical activities, and the needs within troop-contributing countries for training in those areas.

With regard to UNMISS, Security Council resolution 2677 (2023) stresses that the protection of civilians shall be given priority in decisions about the use of available capacity and resources. In that regard, I would like to ask Lieutenant General Mohan Subramanian for more information on the Mission's plan to adjust its protection-of-civilians strategy to respond to attacks against civilians in internally displaced persons camps and protection-of-civilians sites promptly and effectively, particularly following the violent scenes at Malakal in May. Also, what is the role of the military component in deterring and preventing sexual and gender-based violence, including by actively intervening to protect civilians threatened by sexual violence?

The ongoing drawdown of MONUSCO offers an opportunity to assess how the guidance collected in resolution 2594 (2021) is being applied and to identify new lessons on peacekeeping transitions and the protection of civilians. Lieutenant General Otávio Rodrigues De Miranda Filho has provided a very frank assessment on how the protection-of-civilians mandate needs to be proactive and efficient, primarily to gain the trust of the local population. Could he perhaps elaborate on how the protection of civilians, including children, and the response to conflict-related sexual violence will be addressed during the transition phase so as to ensure that sufficient capacity remains to protect all civilians?

Turning to UNIFIL, where Malta is also a troop-contributing country, we remain concerned about the recent number of incidents along the Blue Line. I would like to ask Major General Lázaro Sáenz — what are the emerging challenges faced by the personnel in protecting civilians under imminent threat of physical violence and how can the Security Council support and increase the protection of civilians in those emerging and challenging contexts?

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): We wish to express our gratitude to the United Kingdom for convening this annual briefing. The theme is of paramount importance for the consolidation of the gains of peacekeeping operations.

We wish to associate ourselves with the Council members in expressing our condolences to Ghana over the death of a Ghanaian peacekeeper today.

We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations for his important briefing, and we thank the Force Commanders of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for their reflections and perspectives on the role of military protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. More importantly, we wish to pay tribute to their work in the field.

The Security Council adopted resolution 2436 (2018), aimed at improving the performance of peacekeeping personnel at all levels, both at Headquarters and in the field. The purpose was to emphasize the need to improve posture, behaviour, leadership, initiative and accountability. Bearing in mind the complex and dynamic operational scenarios, we would like

to encourage peacekeeping missions to continue improving the process of evaluating troop capabilities in order to guarantee the operational capacity to face the current challenges. In that context, we urge troop-contributing countries to adequately prepare their contingents according to the mandate requirements and the concept of operational employment for a specific operation. We believe that the protection of civilians starts at home.

Ensuring security and respect for human rights and human dignity are the foundations of international humanitarian law, as prescribed in the 1949 Geneva Conventions, their Protocols Additional and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In that regard, we agree that actions to protect civilians should be the subject of open, shared and concerted debate through a multisectoral team, comprising representatives of the Government, agencies of the United Nations system and, of course, the defence and security forces of the host country.

I wish to highlight our experience in Mozambique. The Mozambican defence and security forces and the supporting forces in the fight against terrorism, namely from Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community, have always prioritized the protection of civilian populations through joint participation in many activities, including productive and reconstruction activities, in compliance with the rules of international humanitarian law. In that context, we call on the Security Council to continue its efforts to achieve a cessation of hostilities in all conflicts that continue to claim human lives, placing thousands of innocent civilians in a perpetual situation of extreme vulnerability. We would like to pay tribute to those women and men who lost their lives serving in peacekeeping missions in the noble search for lasting peace and security. We thank the troop-contributing countries for their continued devotion and unwavering support for lasting peace. We reiterate our appeal to the international community to continue its financial support to the multifaceted United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world.

To the host countries of United Nations peacekeeping missions, we would like to recognize their crucial role. We encourage them to maintain adequate cooperation with United Nations peacekeeping missions. The status-of-forces agreement between the United Nations and the host State is of extreme importance for both parties. It creates an enabling platform for productive work.

I wish to conclude by once again commending the United Kingdom for providing this opportunity for us to share ideas, experiences and good practices on such a fundamental topic as the protection of civilians in conflict situations.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and the respective Force Commanders of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Lieutenant General Subramanian; the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lieutenant General Otávio Rodrigues de Miranda Filho; and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz, for the assessments they have provided.

We consider the protection of civilians as one of the integral elements of the activities of United Nations peacekeeping missions. At the same time, we cannot agree with the frequently voiced opinion that the protection of the civilian population is the very purpose of peacekeeping as a whole. The need to protect the population is a consequence of conflicts, and the only way in which to effectively guarantee the safety and security of civilians is by eliminating the root causes of those conflicts. Protection support is, in any case, a temporary measure that is necessary in order to buy time in the search for a political and diplomatic solution. The history of conflicts in various regions of the world has proven that it is high-quality, painstaking political and mediation efforts, which lie at the heart of the work of peacekeeping missions, that help to address the root causes of confrontations, rather than merely treating the symptoms. Otherwise, even after a temporary respite, crises run the risk of re-emerging.

We are also convinced that no one can protect the civilian population better than the State. That is the responsibility of national Governments and their security agencies. In that regard, if peacekeeping missions have a mandate to protect civilians, then it must be implemented in a comprehensive manner and in close cooperation with the national authorities, local communities and relevant humanitarian organizations.

In that regard, parallel efforts must be made to promote security sector reform and improve training for security institutions, because if they are not strengthened and professionalized, it will not be possible to achieve lasting results. Unfortunately, that

area does not always receive sufficient attention, which leads to peacekeeping missions prolonging their stay in the countries in which they are deployed. The often-uncoordinated efforts of various international and bilateral partners also do not contribute to rectifying the situation.

We believe that the question of how realistic the protection-of-civilians mandates of peacekeeping missions are requires further reflection. In recent years, the scope of what that task has been taken to mean has been growing. It now comprises three clusters — in addition to providing physical protection, these are also peacebuilding programmes, and human rights monitoring, including on gender issues, the prevention of sexual violence and so on. Whether that actually improves effectiveness is a major question, but it certainly leads to an increase in the population's expectations, which unfortunately are not always met. The protection of civilians by peacekeepers in camps, including in camps for internally displaced persons, cannot be a sustainable and long-term solution and could create new problems in the future.

A large share of responsibility is borne by the Security Council, which assigns tasks to missions that peacekeepers, despite their selfless work, are physically unable to carry out within the available means. In that regard, the penholders on the relevant files, together with the Secretariat and the missions on the ground, must take a responsible approach.

Such unfulfilled public expectations often give rise to criticism of peacekeeping missions, which many later refer to as disinformation or false information against peacekeepers. The issue of hate speech and misinformation against both peacekeepers and the civilian population is nothing new. We are convinced that establishing a constructive relationship, trust-based contacts and well-built strategies for communication with the host country, primarily with the Government and the local population, are among the key ways to overcome that challenge.

We believe that more precise, realistic and feasible mandates will help to improve the effectiveness of missions' work and mitigate the shortage of resources, which are often spent on secondary tasks.

With regard to early-warning and response systems and new technologies in general, they can contribute to the safety of peacekeepers and civilians. At the same time, when introducing such technologies, we must

take into account the need to respect the sovereignty of the host and neighbouring States and to protect the inviolability of the private lives of citizens. That work should be based not only on protecting data from falling into the hands of third parties, but also on the unconditional need to check all incoming and outgoing information for accuracy.

In conclusion, we would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all peacekeepers, who serve with dignity and fulfil their noble duty in extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances, risking their lives on a daily basis. We also wish to express our condolences to Ghana and all other States who have lost peacekeepers in the line of duty, as well as the families of those killed in action.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Force Commanders for their briefings. Through them, I thank their troops for their valuable work to implement the mandates crafted by the Council.

Japan attaches high importance to the protection of civilians. Although the primary responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians falls to host Governments, the international community should also make the utmost effort to support them. We applaud peacekeeping missions for playing their part.

Peacekeeping missions need to take a whole-of-mission approach to the protection of civilians. All components in peacekeeping, from military and police to civilian, can and should utilize their respective strengths to contribute to the implementation of a protection-of-civilians mandate. Here, the military components contribute not only at Tier II, through the provision of physical protection, but also at the other tiers by accessing volatile and sometimes hostile areas and conducting broader protection-of-civilians efforts on behalf of the mission.

In the light of that, Japan's intervention today will focus on the military components' role in prevention and pre-emption.

First, as Under-Secretary-General Lacroix said in his briefing, opportunities and threats brought about by a mixture of emerging technologies and asymmetric terrain are a unique feature that peacekeeping missions face. The spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media is only one aspect of the challenges.

I echo the statement made by the representative of Switzerland that the larger trend of rapid technological development, including the expansion of artificial intelligence, will soon affect missions in both a positive and a negative way. In the meantime, missions are acquiring new capabilities, such as peacekeeping intelligence. Data gathering and analysis matter a great deal. Japan looks forward to engaging further in establishing the Peacekeeping Intelligence Academy on top of the C4ISR Academy for Peace Operations, as part of our commitment to seize new opportunities. My question, directed in particular to Major General Lázaro Sáenz, is about threat mitigation. Given his experience in tackling misinformation and disinformation, how will military components embrace and adapt to those unique challenges, including those incurred by misinformation and disinformation, when engaging in prevention and pre-emption?

Secondly, more missions have been facing transitions lately. Mechanisms established by peacekeeping missions for the protection of civilians, such as community engagement for early warning, must be maintained throughout any transition, regardless of how short the given time frame. In that connection, my questions are directed, in particular, to Lieutenant General Rodrigues De Miranda Filho and Lieutenant General Subramanian. How can military components contribute to whole-of-mission efforts to create and keep protection-of-civilians mechanisms during and after transitions, and what could the Security Council do in order to make military components' contributions more effective?

Finally, as all of the briefers mentioned, training and capacity-building for peacekeepers are always important. Implementing the protection of civilians requires peacekeepers to have solid discipline, the right mindset and a deep understanding of local dynamics, especially when it comes to prevention and pre-emption. To provide needed training and capacity-building, it is necessary to know the capability gaps that peacekeepers have in that undertaking. I would be keen to learn about the briefers' insights into crucial capability gaps.

The protection of civilians is an indispensable force enabler for missions, but we also know that its implementation is often understood to pose risks to the safety and security of peacekeepers. I join others in expressing our condolences to the Government and the people of Ghana and of other countries on the

loss of their peacekeepers. The Security Council and Council members share the responsibility with other stakeholders to take that into consideration and to ensure that missions and peacekeepers are adequately prepared to effectively carrying out the protection-of-civilians mandate by guaranteeing their own safety and security at the same time.

In conclusion, I extend my gratitude for today's opportunity to express our appreciation to the troops for their valuable work, and to exchange views in order to strengthen our partnership on this crucial aspect of peacekeeping.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the three Force Commanders for their briefings on their respective missions. We convey our condolences on the demise, earlier today, of a Ghanaian peacekeeper of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the line of duty.

The protection of civilians is one of the important mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations. For decades, thousands of peacekeepers have built and shored up lines of defence to protect lives with their flesh and blood in their areas of operations, in which the flames of war and conflict rage with punishing frequency and intensity. They have watered the flowers of peace with the sweat of their toil and brought calm and hope to populations in conflict areas.

In recent years, in the context of the evolving international security landscape, hot-button issues at the regional level have been rapidly emerging, and new circumstances, tasks and challenges loom large for the protection-of-civilians mandate of peacekeeping operations. In that regard, I would like to make four points.

First, the protection-of-civilians function should be effectively implemented through a combination of measures. In peacekeeping operations, it is necessary to strengthen conflict prevention and optimize early-warning arrangements so that security risks can be detected and addressed as soon as possible. It is necessary to develop systematic and holistic action plans and improve the capacity of situational awareness to enable a swift response. The vulnerabilities of special groups, including women and children, should be taken into full account, and the protection afforded to them should be more robust and tailored. We cannot rely on a military approach alone.

To effectively implement the protection-of-civilians mandate, peacekeeping operations must increase their focus on engagement and dialogue so as to create a secure environment. We commend the establishment of the UNIFIL-led tripartite mechanism for communication with the Lebanese and Israeli armed forces.

Secondly, the protection-of-civilians mandate is part of the overall framework and should be considered as such. The mandate should be planned in conjunction with the missions' other mandates and implemented in a balanced manner. All mandates serve one purpose — to help bring about a political solution. In recent years, the unbridled proliferation of peacekeeping operations mandates has further aggravated the pre-existing strain on resources and capacity, impinging on missions' ability to properly implement their protection-of-civilians mandate. The Secretary-General will issue a report next month on peacekeeping operations mandate assessments and recommendations. We look forward to the report providing helpful input to inform the Council's future decisions.

Thirdly, it is necessary for stakeholders to work in synergy across various dimensions. Host countries have the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. Peacekeeping operations should actively support host countries in addressing security challenges and developing greater protection-of-civilians capacity. A number of United Nations missions, within the remit of their mandates, have supported security sector capacity-building in the host countries through, among other things, specialized training and joint patrols, with positive results. That is commendable.

Security Council sanctions have seriously hampered the ability of some African countries to fulfil their protection-of-civilians responsibility. Those sanctions should be lifted as soon as possible. The international community should intensify its partnership with Africa and support African countries in steadily improving their capacity for peacekeeping operations, owned and led by the countries themselves.

Fourthly, additional resources and efforts should be invested to keep peacekeepers safe and secure. In recent years, we have seen a steady rise in security risks to peacekeepers. We encourage the comprehensive implementation of resolution 2518 (2020) to provide our peacekeepers with multidimensional, multitier safety and security assurances. All stakeholders,

including the Secretariat, missions, troop-contributing countries and host countries, should make solid efforts to that end. As co-Chair of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers, China facilitated the convening of a thematic briefing in February this year to explore and discuss, in greater depth, the new context and issues related to peacekeepers' safety and security. We wish to work with all partners to continue forging greater consensus, taking proactive actions and enhancing efforts to ensure the safety and security of the Blue Helmets and the people they protect in conflict areas.

China is a builder and defender of world peace and a participant in, and contributor to, United Nations peacekeeping operations. For more than 30 years, China has deployed more than 50,000 peacekeepers to more than 20 countries to participate in peacekeeping operations that faithfully fulfil their mandates and honour the mission of peace. China will continue to support, promote and participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations and to step up contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Ms. Shaheen (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, and the Force Commanders of the respective peacekeeping forces for their valuable briefings today.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to all peacekeepers, including the Force Commanders who are present with us today, for their service and dedication to achieving peace in extremely challenging environments. I also wish to pay tribute to all peacekeepers who lost their lives while in the line of duty, including the Ghanaian peacekeeper who was killed earlier today.

United Nations Peacekeeping missions are one of the most notable tools of multilateralism, and their work is an embodiment of solidarity with host countries. Over the years, the nature of peacekeeping missions and the challenges faced by peacekeepers have evolved. As such, the important work that they carry out must match the shifting nature of international peace and security. Accordingly, I would like to focus on three points.

First, the protection of civilians is a whole-of-mission approach by peacekeepers. While the military component plays an important role in preventing and addressing ongoing challenges to civilians, there are additional factors that contribute to establishing peace.

Violence has become a daily occurrence for many civilians in situations that are inscribed in the Council's agenda, eroding the social fabric of communities and limiting their opportunity to live a decent life. The protection of civilians through peacekeeping missions would be impossible without employees who deal with civil affairs within local communities, political teams involved in good offices, gender and child protection advisers and others.

Secondly, the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech is a threat to peace operations. They create division, increase tensions and stoke fear among civilians. We are concerned about the spread of those kinds of information and their adverse impacts on peace operations.

Through resolution 2686 (2023), the Council condemned misinformation, disinformation and incitement to violence against United Nations peacekeeping operations, which affect the safety of peacekeepers and their ability to implement their mandates. The deployment of military public information officers with strategic communication skills and backgrounds will support peacekeeping missions in identifying, evaluating and responding to misinformation and disinformation, and will promote efforts undertaken by those missions to meet the expectations of local communities and engage local actors to improve relations between those communities and the peacekeeping missions.

Thirdly, peace operations should develop strategies to not only address current challenges, but also anticipate emerging challenges with regard to providing protection. Well-informed peacekeepers can play a more effective role.

As Council members know, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and drones used by armed groups pose threats to civilians and peacekeepers alike. It is therefore important to provide the military component of peace operations with the necessary equipment and technology to enable them to protect civilians and address emerging threats. That includes geoprofiling software that provides the military with the necessary information to counter IEDs threats.

I will conclude by directing a question to Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Force Commanders here today. In operative paragraph 11 of resolution 2686 (2023), which the Security Council unanimously adopted last month, the Council

“[r]equests United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions, within their respective mandates, to monitor hate speech, racism and acts of extremism that negatively affect peace and security, and to include reporting on these issues in their regular reporting to the Council”.

I would like to hear their reflections about how those phenomena impact the delivery of their mandates and how peacekeeping missions will respond.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting, as well as Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the Force Commanders of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations Mission in South Sudan and United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for their interesting reports this morning.

I begin my remarks by acknowledging the work of the Force Commanders of peacekeeping missions, who work under difficult conditions in different parts of the world to fulfil the mandates entrusted by the Council and, in this way, contribute in a very special and direct way to the maintenance of international peace and security. Ecuador supports their efforts and pays tribute to all the Blue Helmets deployed around the world.

I join the other members of the Council in expressing our condolences to Ghana for the death of one of its nationals.

A few days ago, the Secretary-General presented his policy report entitled *New Agenda for Peace*, in which he recalls that peace operations are an essential part of the diplomatic tools of this Organization, as they make it possible to organize responses in the field, mobilizing and financing collective capabilities that no other actor possesses.

We are convinced that this valuable tool must be used as responsibly as possible, ensuring consistency between what happens on the ground and what is decided at the Council. For that reason, we take due note of what the Secretary-General points out regarding the existence of a gap between mandates and what peace missions can actually deliver in practice and the need to ensure that the primacy of politics remains a central principle in that regard.

In that connection, we would like to hear the experience of the Force Commanders on what the Secretary-General has called “unrealistic mandates”

in their operations, so that the Council can always seek to improve them and make them clearer and more achievable.

Along the same lines, given that the protection of civilians is increasingly important in the design and focus of peace operations and that operations have had to take on additional tasks in that regard, do the Force Commanders believe that their missions are in a position to respond to the demands related to the protection of civilians?

Finally, in the case of UNIFIL, we would like to know the main challenges in fulfilling the mandate to ensure that refugee-return policies from Lebanese territory comply with the principles of security, voluntariness and dignity established in international standards.

Mr. Moretti (Brazil): Like others, I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, Lieutenant General Subramanian, Lieutenant General Rodrigues De Miranda Filho and Major General Lázaro Sáenz for their insightful briefings. I also thank all those who serve as peacekeepers and are essential to the Organization's long history of protecting civilians worldwide.

I join others in expressing condolences to Ghana on the recent loss of one of its peacekeepers in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

I commend the United Kingdom for convening the annual briefing by the heads of United Nations military components from selected missions and for addressing the protection of civilians.

The protection of civilians, which is an increasingly important matter for United Nations peacekeeping missions, is a complex and challenging task, as we know. Present-day dynamic operational landscapes include new threats, such as misinformation and disinformation. Those hazards can become tools to sow discord, undermine trust in institutions and incite violence.

In an era when State and non-State actors are intensifying the misuse of communication and Blue Helmets face increasingly hostile environments, competent use of strategic communications is critical for efficient peacekeeping and for the safety of the peacekeepers. We commend military components for engaging with local communities to raise awareness of the dangers of misinformation and disinformation and for monitoring and analysing online and offline information flow to identify and track threats.

By updating and detailing mandates, the Security Council should continue to encourage the marked improvements in strategic communications we have seen in United Nations peace operations recently.

Radio networks are a vital method of communication with large-scale and diverse communities, particularly in locations where the Internet connection is poor. Radio Miraya in South Sudan, Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guira FM in the Central African Republic and Mikado FM in Mali, for instance, provide access to credible and trustworthy sources of information for local populations. Those radio stations debunk rumours and fake news by operating as part of United Nations peacekeeping missions, especially for communities that do not access information regularly online.

I would like to conclude by posing a couple of questions to the briefers.

The first question is: What is the single most relevant emerging challenge faced by United Nations peacekeepers in protecting civilians? And the second question is: How can military components broaden their work with local communities to raise awareness of the dangers of misinformation and disinformation?

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

First, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Force Commanders for their briefings today. Through them, I want to thank all United Nations peacekeeping women and men for their dedicated and courageous work to protect civilians and uphold stability around the world. The United Kingdom pays tribute to all peacekeepers who have given their lives in the service of the United Nations, including, today, the peacekeeper from Ghana. I join others in sending my condolences.

Wherever there is war or armed conflict, civilians are caught in the middle. Properly trained, equipped and supported peacekeepers can play a critical role in protecting civilians. As well as providing physical protection, proactive and mobile peacekeeping forces can act to prevent threats, establish protective environments and facilitate humanitarian access.

To succeed in that, peacekeepers need and deserve the full support of the Security Council and of host States. In recent years, however, missions have faced increasing challenges. Restrictions on free movement,

status-of-forces agreement violations, misinformation and disinformation and the presence of mercenaries, such as the Wagner Group, have all served to undermine the work of peacekeepers in numerous missions.

I had a handful of questions, but they have all been covered by others, so I will move on.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I will give the floor back to our briefers to respond to the questions posed and for any other remarks they may wish to offer. I will start with our three Force Commanders and will then perhaps turn to Under-Secretary-General Lacroix at the end in case there are any horizontal issues that we have missed.

I give the floor to Lieutenant General Subramanian to respond to any comments directed to him.

Lieutenant General Subramanian: I will attempt to answer the various questions posed specifically about the South Sudanese context, as well as about what is generally applicable to us.

With regard to the specific questions, I think the first question was about how we cope with the impact of the Sudan situation in the already tenuous situation that we find in South Sudan. We are definitely concerned about the number of refugees and returnees returning to South Sudan from the Sudan. As of now, we there are about 200,000 who have arrived. They have arrived predominantly in the Upper Nile state in a location of ours where we have a base called Renk. Renk is a town that previously had a population of about 100,000 and today has a population of over 200,000. So, there is definitely congestion there. There is a contest for resources. There is frustration about not getting relocated quickly enough to the villages, and therefore there is a situation developing there which we are handling in terms of reinforcing our presence in that area, conducting patrols and coordinating all agencies, funds and programmes that are working there, and trying to work with the local government, as well as the national Government, to decongest that location as soon as possible.

We have had some success. Right now, the number of people who are coming into Renk and the number of people being decongested from Renk are almost the same, therefore we have sort of controlled the situation. However, at the same time we are conscious of the fact that what is essentially a humanitarian situation now

can develop into a security dimension very shortly and very quickly. Therefore, we are prepared for all eventualities. All our units are keeping track of the new returnees in the respective states and are ensuring that we remain in contact in terms of patrolling and in community engagement so that we are on top of any security development with respect to their arrivals.

In terms of our protection-of-civilians sites and internally displaced person (IDP) sites and the comments on recent developments, I wish to state that a large number of displaced people in South Sudan stay in IDP sites. What we call “IDP sites” are sites in which displaced people are gathered. Those sites and their security are under the management of the South Sudanese Government, but we are prepared and stand deployed to react to any external threat of physical violence to the inmates of those IDP sites.

In contrast, the protection-of-civilians camp that we manage in Malakal is entirely in our management. In normal times, it is managed by the United Nations police, and when, for some reason, a situation goes beyond their control, it is handed over to the force so that the conflict situation can be take care of seamlessly.

With regard to the protection-of-civilians site in Malakal, which is under the management of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, one month ago, there were approximately 42,000 people there primarily from two main communities — approximately 35,000 from the Shilluk community and approximately 7,000 from the Nuer community. Those are two communities that had always existed in reasonable harmony, but in the past six to seven months, owing to various factors outside the protection-of-civilians camp, a fault line developed between the communities, and therefore there was an indication that there could be trouble in the protection-of-civilians camp as well. Those are essentially humanitarian complexes where people are provided protection, as well as a modicum of security, and provided the requisite humanitarian support to carry on with their lives. They are not essentially military fortresses.

The problem endemic to South Sudan is the proliferation of weapons. Weapons are in villages, communities and cattle herds with shepherds. And they are also inside those IDP sites and protection-of-civilians camps, despite the security that has been provided to them over the years. Because of that factor, whenever a clash breaks out in any of them, an immediate burst

of casualties is very difficult to avoid. Our efforts are greatly focused on the containment of those casualties. How have we devised our procedures for that? Upon being warned of a possible imminent clash, the force tries to use its quick reaction forces to show its presence, first, by firing in the air and thereafter quickly move in between the communities that are clashing and try to segregate the armed actors in the violence and thereby ensure that the violence subsides. That is what we did in the Malakal protection-of-civilians camp. Within the first 20 minutes of the first shot that was fired, 17 people, all armed, were killed, but in the next 15 minutes to an hour or so, the force managed to place itself between the clashing communities and separate them, and, fortunately, the situation has remained stable ever since. That is largely our strategy for protection-of-civilians camps and internally displaced persons sites. There are priority areas of protection, and this is how we do it.

On the question of use of technology and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance for the benefit of a mission, as of now a common data platform is used across most United Nations missions. Ours is no exception. We have the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise platform wherein all actors—the force, the police, the civil affairs advisers, the political affairs advisers—provide inputs that are entered into the system and made seamlessly available to all of us. This provides much better early warning than the previous system we used. The system is being improved continuously but the United Nations is working to replace it with a new system called Unite Aware, which, when it comes through, will provide even better early warning. In terms of base-defence technology, our closed-circuit television cameras generate input that is collated on a central platform, which also helps.

In answer to the question on artificial intelligence (AI) and its relevance to future peacekeeping, I definitely think that, in terms of threat monitoring, analysing the empirical data available, extrapolating trends of violence and doing a sort of forecasting of conflicts will help forces in all missions. Developing situational awareness can also be enhanced with incorporation of AI. Training in combat simulation and helping the troop-contributing countries in their predeployment training and in-mission training can also realistically achieve more meaningful results through AI. Another area where AI can be useful is health care, where we are now pioneering certain aspects of telemedicine to cover

areas not covered by the 10-1-2 doctrine. In that regard, AI can be useful in ensuring the provision of immediate and efficient medical care before getting the patient to the appropriate medical authority.

How can military components contribute to a whole-of-mission approach? Indeed, we are already doing so. The complete protection-of-civilians strategy in our Mission—and I think in all missions—is a whole-of-mission strategy with Tiers 1, 2 and 3 actions. The force is a predominant player in Tier 2, which involves physical protection, and in Tier 1 and 3 we have a role to play along with others. Tier 1, of course, involves the engagement with leadership and communities; the forces are involved, as are all substantive sections. This engagement is collectively coordinated by the Mission chief of staff. In this way, we avoid excessive overlap in such engagement, and our efforts synergistically add up to value. Similarly, in Tier 3, which is to create an environment conducive to the protection of civilians, we all work together, with coordination being ensured at Mission headquarters, by the Mission chief of staff in particular.

In Tier 2, the force naturally has a predominant role to play, which is in providing physical protection, and in this regard, we are also not alone. Physical protection is coordinated with various partners and with the police in particular, as well as the host Government, armed factions of opposition groups and other actors relevant in this regard. The whole-of-mission approach is therefore not just an idea, but the only way to go for the protection of civilians. I think that is what all our integrated missions are doing, and I think military components have a major contribution to make not only in Tier 2 but also in Tiers 1 and 3. Nevertheless, we understand that, as a Council member remarked earlier, the protection of civilians is an intermediate objective in the overall political objectives of a mission. Even so, it is a very important intermediate objective, and it is one on which we are all focusing.

How can military components contribute to a whole-of-mission approach during and after transitions to ensure stability? Clearly, we all understand the primacy of politics in building sustainable peace in the countries in which we are operating. To that end, the force is contributing to security sector reform and capacity-building and training of the host Government's security forces. In addition, I do think that, in a certain way, we are making an impact on the host Governments by setting examples of behaviour and

conduct as a professional military force. We provide force protection for the activities of various actors in a range of political and substantive actions, and we support engagements under all of the pillars in terms of protection and in providing an enabling environment. That is the contribution we can make — and which we are making — to sustainable peace during and after transitions.

How do we adapt our strategy and tactics to engage local actors and armed groups and the host Government forces in order to have a comprehensive approach in support of the protection of civilians? That is indeed what we are striving for. We have to be conscious of the fact that not all parties to a conflict are neutral, so our engagement has to be suitably fine-tuned to ensure that we are engaging the most neutral partners. As far as those who are engaged in the conflict in some way or the other, we deal with them as per the requirement of the protection of civilians. We are supposed to act against violence in any form, without regard to the source of such violence. We are therefore very conscious of the importance of identifying the source of the violence. To that end, we have certain formal forums within the Mission. Once a year, we get all the divisional commanders and all leaders of armed factions to Juba, the capital of the country, wherein we discuss all issues relevant to the protection of civilians, including freedom of movement, in a transparent manner. We just had this annual meeting on 18 July.

Similarly, we have forums at the regional level. We have multiple quarterly forums in which we try to engage the armed factions of Government and opposition forces, in particular, so as to provide an environment conducive to the protection of civilians. One of the primary factors that affects us and for which we need this engagement is the freedom of movement — over land, on the Nile River and in the air. In our context, this is something that is engaging our attention. While numbers would indicate there has been an improvement on this in South Sudan, there are critical areas where we wish to go in conflict situations where there are access denials. We therefore continuously try to push the envelope, and we are working with the host Government on every access denial that takes place in order to move forward and ensure that any necessary movement is not denied or hindered in future.

In terms of winning the trust of local governments and the local population, again we rely on engagement at various levels, including at the highest level,

namely, between the Mission and the Government of South Sudan. We hold a monthly high-level agenda coordination meeting with the Foreign Minister and senior functionaries of the Defence Ministry and ministries relevant to our task. There is a similar meeting exclusively between the force and the Ministry of Defence. We also replicate these forums at the state level. Further, in terms of our patrols and engagement teams, coordination at the grass-roots level is sought after with the communities. All of that together helps us in our goal to build trust, faith in and respect for each other as well as to foster an understanding of our objectives and our operations.

I think I have covered most of the questions that have been addressed with respect to South Sudan. If I have missed anything, I am ready to take the floor again and answer any further questions. That said, I think I have covered all the questions posed to me.

The President: I now give the floor to Lieutenant-General Rodrigues de Miranda Filho to respond to the comments and questions addressed to him.

Lieutenant-General Rodrigues de Miranda Filho: There are two or three main conditions for success in a peace operation. I would like to make some comments, and hopefully I will be able to cover at least the majority of the questions with these comments.

Again, in order to be successful in a peace operation, there are at least two or three very important aspects. The first one is in the human domain: we must earn the population's confidence as well as the Government's; we must establish a very close relationship with the Government. All of that is mandatory. We also have to control and coordinate in the theatre of operations, mainly when we have to work with not only the local forces, such as, in our case, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, but also many regional forces, including the East African Community regional force and those under the Southern African Development Community and bilateral agreements.

The second one concerns the technology domain, which was very well-emphasized earlier by other speakers. The use of modern enablers such as artificial intelligence, unmanned aircraft systems and digital technologies, among others, is extremely important to guaranteeing the security and protection of peacekeepers. If I had more time, I could give Security Council members some examples as to how the use of such capabilities in the area of operations of the

United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) have helped us to save many lives. Establishing a viable early-warning and response mechanism is also very important to succeeding in that kind of operation.

The third condition — and perhaps the most important — is understanding the mandate. MONUSCO is under a Chapter VII mandate, which means that our operation is not a peacekeeping operation, but a peace enforcement operation, which changes everything. Therefore, in order to be able to promote the protection of civilians in a mission such as MONUSCO, it is very important that all troop-contributing countries understand the meaning of their mandate. Otherwise, it will be extremely difficult for them to earn and to maintain the trust of the population and the Government.

With regard to the transition process, I will not go into deep detail about that, as Mr. Lacroix will soon update the Council with a special report on the transition process in MONUSCO. What I can relay to the Council is that we are doing that in a very responsible way. We are planning to withdraw from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in phases, so that we can guarantee the protection of civilians, which is the main concern of all Council members. The condition is: when we withdraw from a base or area, the local or regional forces will have to replace us immediately in order to guarantee the protection of civilians in our area of responsibility. The Force Intervention Brigade will also remain in our hands until the end of the process in order to be able to intervene, if necessary, within the entire area of responsibility, which, with the drawdown, we will lose the ability to do. It is therefore extremely important that a strong force remain in the hands of the Force Commander, so that he can continue protection-of-civilians operations, including during the transition process.

I would like to emphasize that regional forces will play an important and fundamental role in the transition process. As we think about that, it is very important to consider how we will include the regional forces when we renew the MONUSCO mandate. We need to be able to support the regional forces, as I have no doubt that, alone, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will face huge difficulties in replacing us and guaranteeing the protection of civilians for their citizens at the same level.

Together with the transition process, one of the most significant challenges for me as Force Commander will lie in being able to push my troops to be proactive and effective. When a mission is withdrawing, the troop-contributing country (TCC) may think: why should I put my life at risk if the mission is almost at the finish line? For some TCCs, perhaps, that makes no sense. But we have to fulfil our mandate up until the last day in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is therefore a big challenge for us, namely, to push the troops of the TCCs to work well and proactively up until the last day of the Mission's presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Someone asked what the greatest challenge before us is. For me, the greatest challenge involves the myths, disinformation and hate speech that not only MONUSCO but other missions have to face in the extremely dangerous environments that we have to deal with now. In order to help the Mission to combat and face that problem, we are strictly following the guidance provided by the Strategic Communications and Public Information Division. I have closed all social media for the force, at the battalion and sector levels, including at my headquarters. We no longer have any kind of social media, so that we have only one voice — the MONUSCO voice. That will significantly help to combat misinformation and disinformation, as well as disseminate only one narrative to the population, which has to come from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kinshasa.

My last words will once again emphasize the role of Council members in terms of the new MONUSCO mandate. I ask them to please seriously consider the matter to allow us to support the regional forces.

The President: I thank Lieutenant General Rodrigues De Miranda Filho for his additional comments and responses to the questions.

I now give the floor to Major General Lázaro Sáenz to provide us with specific comments concerning the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Major General Lázaro Sáenz: I will address the questions about the role of the traditional peacekeeping mission as it relates to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), in terms of the provisions of Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations.

The first aspect is related to the role of intelligence, surveillance and satellite communications. I would

like to say that UNIFIL has long-standing experience integrating intelligence in its assessments, operations and reporting. We are also implementing an aggressive strategic communications strategy to counter misinformation. In that regard, we see a key role for the Lebanese Government to play in helping to counter dangerous narratives that endanger both the local population and our peacekeepers. With regard to the use of artificial intelligence to counter the risks, I would like to say that the parties — Lebanon, including Hizbullah, and Israel — have sophisticated technology and that UNIFIL, with the help of civilian assets and the troop-contributing countries, is moving forward in developing its capacity to monitor the concerns, fears and aspirations of the local communities, which is to say that the digital transformation strategy for United Nations peacekeeping is providing us with guidance in that regard.

With regard to how to reinforce the capacity of host nations to protect civilians — as host nations have the primary responsibility to do so — we look to Lebanon and Israel to agree to a permanent ceasefire in order to establish a lasting peace. We believe that to be the best way to protect civilians in both countries. The political leadership in both parties has a key role in that regard. We also encourage political support for a Lebanese national defence strategy, which is a key requirement to address the issue of weapons outside State authority and to meaningfully expand State authority in the southern part of Lebanon, as a key factor in maintaining peace and stability. The current financial crisis in Lebanon has had a devastating impact on the Lebanese Armed Forces and, of course, on the population as well. The Council has shown its support through paragraphs 10 and 11 of resolution 2650 (2022). That support has been greatly appreciated by the Lebanese Armed Forces.

With regard to emergent threats against civilians and how the Security Council could provide support in the event of a new conflict between Lebanon and Israel, I stress that such a conflict would be catastrophic in scale and have terrible outcomes and devastating consequences for civilians in both countries. The best way to prevent it is through a durable peace agreement and a permanent ceasefire. UNIFIL operates alongside the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) political mission, which has a mandate to work on both internal political cohesion in Lebanon and on the land boundary between Lebanon and Israel. I urge the Council to continue its support, if possible,

and encourage the parties to engage in such a dialogue. Talks to agree on demarcation of the Blue Line, under the scope of UNIFIL, could be a practical first step in that process, which UNIFIL is ready to lead, with the Council's support, when the parties are ready and willing to proceed in that manner.

With regard to UNIFIL's efforts to counter disinformation, I would like to say that misleading information about UNIFIL has a negative impact on the delivery of our mandate and on the safety and security of our peacekeepers. For example, such information might have had some influence on the attack against our peacekeepers in December. In that regard, we have implemented a new strategy to counter misinformation that includes, among other aspects, the key leader engagements with authorities in the capital and in the south of Lebanon, with great influence on the local population. We believe that the Government of Lebanon has a major responsibility to ensure that the mandate of UNIFIL is clarified publicly through its statements and its support for the activities of the mission and its peacekeepers. The international community's support is also needed to help combat misinformation and disinformation. I would like to thank Member States that have engaged on that issue through the diplomatic channel. I would also like to highlight the vital role of the liaison and coordination mechanisms of UNIFIL to defuse tensions and critical situations created by misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

Finally, related to the topic of hate speech, racism and extremism, I refer to the comments I have already made about misinformation, and I would like to add that hate speech is aimed at Syrian refugees in Lebanon. UNSCOL and the United Nations country team are working with the Government to ensure the protection of all communities in Lebanon, including Syrian refugees. In conclusion, I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Council on UNIFIL.

The President: I thank Major General Lázaro Sáenz for his additional remarks.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix for any final comments.

Mr. Lacroix: I do not want to unnecessarily prolong this discussion, but I do want to thank the Force Commanders through you, Mr. President, for the very important information they shared with Council members. I would like to highlight that, every single day, peacekeepers are protecting hundreds of thousands

of civilians. I think it important to emphasize that fact in spite of all the challenges and the difficulty of meeting all the expectations. Protection-of-civilians mandates, while very important, raise expectations that cannot always be met owing to such varied challenges as terrain, capacities and lack of support, including sometimes from the host authorities. Nevertheless, I think that the role of our peacekeepers in protecting civilians brings critical added value and needs to be acknowledged.

My second point, very briefly, is that we obviously have a shared responsibility to support and help our peacekeepers to more effectively fulfil their protection-of-civilians mandate. It is critical to better

support political processes, given that, ultimately, the best way to protect civilians is to ensure that the political process advances and reaches a successful conclusion. However, as stated in today's debate, we also have a shared responsibility to ensure that the mandate is focused; that the missions are provided with adequate resources, including, of course, the military components; and that all the efforts that we are collectively undertaking and that we have regrouped under the Action for Peacekeeping and Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiatives continue, with adequate resources and commitment from all of us.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.