



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

**9632**

nd meeting

Tuesday, 21 May 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

*President:* Mr. Afonso . . . . . (Mozambique)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Koudri
China . . . . .	Mr. Fu Cong
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. De La Gasca
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Guyana . . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan . . . . .	Mrs. Shino
Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Kanu
Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Gürber
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

### Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Twenty-fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1265 (1999)

Letter dated 2 May 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2024/359)

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385)

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Protection of civilians in armed conflict**

#### **Twenty-fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1265 (1999)**

#### **Letter dated 2 May 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2024/359)**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide; Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Mr. Hichem Khadhraoui, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following speakers to participate in this meeting: Her Excellency Mrs. Hedda Samson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United

Nations; Her Excellency Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Paul Beresford-Hill, Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations.

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

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2024/359, which contains the text of a letter dated 2 May 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting an aide mémoire on the item under consideration, and document S/2024/385, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nderitu.

**Ms. Nderitu:** I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting today and for inviting me to brief the Council on the important topic of the protection of civilians from the perspective of my mandate. The mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide is outlined in a 2004 letter addressed by the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council (S/2004/567). The letter lists the responsibilities of the Special Adviser and references the source of the mandate as resolution 1366 (2001), calling on the Special Adviser to act as a mechanism for early warning and making recommendations to the Secretary-General and the Security Council by bringing to their attention potential situations that could result in genocide and recommending actions to prevent or halt genocide.

My mandate is for prevention, not adjudication, as only courts of law can determine whether a particular situation amounts to genocide or other related crimes.

Unlike other similarly important mandates, such as those on sexual violence in conflict and children and armed conflict, which report annually through the Secretary-General to the Security Council, no such annual reporting has been established for the mandate on the prevention of genocide. Such annual reporting would enable regular updates to the Council on the situations of populations at risk. I therefore want to begin by making a strong request to the Security Council to periodically extend invitations so that this mandate can present concerns in that area.

The protection of civilians is at the core of my mandate. Genocide does not happen overnight. It is part of a process that is well planned, prepared and followed through. Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide stipulates that national, ethnic, racial and religious groups are protected under that pillar of international law. Genocide is preceded by risk factors and indicators, many of which are related to deficiencies in the protection of civilian populations. The protection of civilians from the risk of genocide therefore requires taking timely action to prevent the commission of the crime. Under article I of the 1948 Convention, the contracting parties affirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or of war, is a crime under international law that they undertake to prevent and punish.

Today I would like to raise the alarm, clearly and unequivocally, about the ongoing situation in the Sudan, which bears all the marks of a risk of genocide, including strong allegations that the crime has already been committed. Civilians are far from being protected, and civilian populations are being targeted based on their identity. In Darfur and El Fasher, civilians are being attacked and killed because of the colour of their skin, their ethnicity and who they are. They are also being targeted with hate speech and direct incitement to violence.

I have raised concerns about this situation publicly from the perspective of my mandate — which I reiterate is the prevention of genocide — including through seven public statements in the past 20 months. On 8 September 2022 I stressed the imperative of ensuring full accountability for the violence of two decades ago, for the sake of the survivors and communities affected in Darfur. On 3 November 2022, I raised the alarm about ongoing ethnic violence in Blue Nile, as well as cross-border mobilization, hate speech and incitement

to hatred. On 13 June 2023, I expressed serious concern about the outbreak of full-fledged hostilities, violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, and especially ethnic and tribal clashes in West Darfur involving ethnic Arabs and ethnic Masalit, as well as in Kordofan and Blue Nile. On 5 September 2023, I sounded the alarm again about the intercommunal and identity-based dimension of the violence and the potential for further escalation. On 14 November 2023, I reiterated my extreme concern about the attacks on the ethnic Masalit community in West Darfur, allegedly perpetrated with an explicit intent to destroy. On 21 December 2023, I put out an alert about the intensification of violence across the wider Sudan following violence in and near Wad Madani, in Gezira. And on 15 April 2024, on the one-year anniversary of the outbreak of the current crisis, I reiterated my concern about the prevailing signs of genocide and related crimes in the Sudan, where people continued to be targeted for who they are.

We have been raising the alarm relentlessly ever since the conflict erupted in April 2023, warning of systematic and indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians in Khartoum, Darfur, Kordofan, Blue Nile, Gezira and El Fasher, among other places. In October of last year, I visited various areas in Chad, including the eastern border with the Sudan, with the aim of collecting first-hand information from refugees from the West Darfur region. What I heard was horrifying. Refugees based in Farchana and Adré, many of them from the Masalit ethnic community, described the vicious violence they were subjected to and were outspoken in alluding to elements that could indicate explicit intent to destroy their particular ethnic group.

The intent to destroy is one of the key elements in the crime of genocide. Article II of the Genocide Convention defines the crime as any of a series of acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”. The types of violence that have allegedly been inflicted on them include the persistent use of rape as a weapon of war, as well as other forms of sexual and gender-based violence; the burning of entire villages; forced displacement; deprivation of necessary conditions for life, including bombings of medical facilities and transportation; and the deliberate limiting of access to water and electricity. That is accompanied by derogatory language that refers to victims as blacks and slaves, which is an element of incitement to violence.

Sexual and gender-based violence provides a clear gender dimension of that vicious violence, together with the targeting of young men and boys. Age-pyramid statistics in the refugee camps I visited showed that adolescents were present in the camps in a proportion that is far lower than the adult population's representation in those camps and the standard representation of males in refugee camps across the world. That could indicate that this segment of the population was being particularly targeted in West Darfur. Ethnically motivated attacks targeting these specific groups — the Masalit, the Fur and the Zaghawa — reportedly continue being conducted, primarily by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied armed Arab militias. They are reported to act in patterns, whereby attacks against specific locations and individuals tend to be announced in advance, which could constitute indication of clear intent to destroy. Explicit calls to wage religious war by the leader of the RSF can go in the same direction.

The situation in West Darfur clearly targets one part of the population, the Masalit, many of whom have fled to Chad, as I have said, and many of whom are killed on the way or in the conflict. Refugees arriving from the Sudan, especially in Chad, indicate that violence is ethnically motivated, including against the Masalit.

I have also received reports by institutions collecting data only on hate speech and incitement of large-scale information operations aimed at supporting RSF activity, including the glorification of war crimes. Such reports outline users operating from other countries as the source of such operations. Witnesses and legal professionals involved in legal efforts to ensure accountability for past violations are victims of targeted attacks. Prominent community leaders have been killed; mass graves have been documented; leaders have called on civilians to take up arms. Such calls are amplified through social media.

The Sudan today is the world's largest displacement crisis, with almost 9 million people displaced. The main parties to the conflict — the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) — continue to show disregard for international human rights and international humanitarian law, and they are not upholding their obligations. Uncontrolled militias with no understanding of chain of command or of the most basic international obligations in conflict constitute a major risk for vulnerable innocent civilians. Uncontrolled forces are reportedly operating with impunity. There is

no distinction, proportionality or precaution in ongoing military operations. The focus is on military victory rather than on protection of civilians.

That is in spite of the parties' explicit commitment to that effect under the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians in the Sudan. The use of heavy weaponry in densely populated areas has been reported; bombings of civilian homes and infrastructure have reportedly been conducted by the Sudanese Armed Forces. All parties to the conflict have been known to commit violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Darfur. Air strikes disproportionately affect civilians, including both African and Arab ethnic groups. In addition, arrest and detention at checkpoints reportedly take place in States controlled by the RSF and the SAF, targeting youth and men, in particular, on the basis of ethnicity or imputed political opinion.

In addition, the lack of effective supply lines affects communities in Darfur that have little or no access to life-saving humanitarian aid. In short, violence is only increasing. The protection presence that existed in the past, with the United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur concluded at the end of 2020, and the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan to assist with building civilian protection and the rule of law was terminated in December last year.

Reports today from El Fasher therefore raise well-grounded concerns of risk of large-scale violence affecting thousands of people. Just last week, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Sudan, Ms. Clementine Nkweta-Salami, alerted that if the parties do not pull back from the brink, the consequences will be devastating for the 800,000 people residing in El Fasher. Recent reported attacks in villages outside El Fasher bear signs of not having military objectives and intending to cause displacement and fear. Reports indicate that the attacks were characterized by indiscriminate violence, including sexual violence, looting of personal belongings from houses and market areas, the razing of residential and commercial structures, cattle rustling and the destruction of property. Fighting is disproportionately affecting civilians, and the parties to the conflict, the de facto authorities and armed groups continue to levy so-called protection fees and arbitrary taxes on the civilian population. The freedom of movement continues to be constrained.

Most people in El Fasher are of African descent — they are black. Early warning signs indicate that if conflict continues, the risk of racially motivated attacks and killings will increase. The situation in West Darfur points to clear targeting of one part of the population — the Masalit. There are also reports of new Arab refugees leaving the area, which could also indicate ethnically motivated attacks against them.

The Sudan today is unequivocally experiencing a situation of armed conflict. There is a record of serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We are witnessing a weak State structure, and we are alarmed, day after day, about motives and incentives for violence, expressed by those who permit it. We are reminded every day of the capacity of some to commit international crimes. In the Sudan we also witness the absence of effective mitigating factors to the current violence. Enabling circumstances of preparatory action for violence are in front of us and plain to see, and triggering factors are as simple as a call to kill. Intergroup tensions or patterns of discrimination against protected groups continue to fuel the cycle of violence. We see clear, explicit and unquestionable signs of an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, protected groups.

This is not just a descriptive list of what is happening today in the Sudan. It is a list of risk factors and indicators for the crime of genocide, the gravest of crimes. The insufficient reaction of the global community to developments in the Sudan nullifies any progress we have collectively made for the prevention of the gravest of crimes. It is imperative that all possible actions aimed at the protection of innocent civilian populations in El Fasher, as in the entire territory of the Sudan, are expedited. It is urgent to stop ethnically motivated violence. Access to humanitarian assistance for population in desperate need is essential. Urgent and safe passage is necessary for civilians wishing to flee El Fasher. All possible attention and support for displaced populations in the Sudan and in the region is imperative.

We know that this violence is not new. In Darfur, the same groups of people were targeted on the basis of their ethnicity, 20 years ago. In Chad, I saw the refugee camps that they escaped to, side by side — one camp 20 years old, and the other camp just a few months old. The conflict has exacerbated pre-existing ethnic divisions, encouraging more ethnically and tribally motivated killings, especially in Darfur.

In other words, the motives or incentives to attack remain. Hate speech and incitement to violence is prevalent. Violence against women and children is being used as a tool of terror. The warring parties are maintaining their financial capacities to engage in fighting rather than in dialogue, allegedly with support from outside the country. The security vacuum has widened, and the warring parties are exploiting it in order to further advance identity-based mobilization and recruitment campaigns.

Decades of engagement, aimed at building real and lasting peace and security in the Sudan, already challenged by periodic cycles of conflict, have seen a dramatic setback. Perpetrators of past violence have actually not been held accountable. Impunity for serious violations of international human rights, for genocide and related crimes or incitement to such crimes, constitutes a risk factor for the commission of other crimes. The absence of accountability for genocide and related crimes perpetrated in Darfur 20 years ago is contributing to the current episodes of horror. It therefore remains imperative that accountability for such crimes is ensured. Perpetrators should be brought before competent courts with jurisdiction and held accountable in order to break the cycle of impunity and violence.

In conclusion, it is important that venues for accountability for the crimes currently being committed — not only in Darfur, but in the entire territory of the Sudan — are identified, promoted and documented, including through supporting the work of those who are documenting what is happening.

In my statements, I have asked the Security Council, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to continue to consider all available tools within their respective peace and security architectures in order to urgently protect civilian populations and to create a conducive environment for a peaceful and durable resolution of the conflict, including expediting opportunities for coordinated dialogue in a concerted manner. Those efforts, including within the League of Arab States, must be ongoing, with the aim of ending the fighting and suffering of the people of the Sudan.

We do know that indeed only the warring parties can stop the fighting. But the international community must continue to shoulder its responsibility to take action to protect the Sudanese people from genocide. The Security Council has a special responsibility to



consider measures in accordance with the gravity of the situation we are facing. Seventy-five years after the adoption of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the human rights and humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Sudan constitutes a blight on our collective conscience. It also contravenes the very essence of the international obligations to prevent and punish the crime of crimes, as enshrined by the Genocide Convention.

The protection of civilians in the Sudan cannot wait. The risk of genocide exists in the Sudan. It is real, and it is growing every single day. I once again thank the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. Pedro Comissário Afonso. It matters a great deal for my mandate and the civilians at risk that you extended me an invitation to brief the Security Council.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Nderitu for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Msuya.

**Ms. Msuya:** This year we mark 25 years since the Security Council added the protection of civilians to its agenda. We also mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, a cornerstone of international humanitarian law aimed at protecting victims of armed conflict. It is an important moment to reflect on the state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and to look at action needed to ensure that international humanitarian law and the decisions of the Council are upheld and that civilians are safeguarded from harm.

It is with regret that I report to the Council that the situation of civilians in armed conflict in 2023 was resoundingly dire. It was a year in which we saw the horrors of the 7 October attack by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on Israel and the intense Israeli military response in Gaza that resulted in death, destruction and suffering at a pace and scale unprecedented in the recent past. About 75 per cent of Gaza's population has been forcibly displaced. A man-made famine is looming. Thousands of children have been killed or injured in what UNICEF colleagues have called a "war on children". An estimated 130 people remain hostage, with ongoing concerns for their humane treatment.

In April 2023, we saw the eruption of similarly brutal conflict in the Sudan, in which tens of thousands of civilians have been killed or injured. Millions of people have been displaced, acute food insecurity has

soared and there have been reports of horrific attacks and inhumane treatment.

Conflicts continued to have a grave and lasting impact on civilians in many other places, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Sahel, Somalia, Syria and Ukraine. In total, the United Nations alone recorded more than 33,000 civilian deaths in armed conflict last year — a staggering number, particularly given that the actual figures are likely higher, and a horrific 72 per cent increase as compared with the previous year.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas had devastating impacts on civilians across numerous conflicts. In the Sudan and Ukraine, for instance, United Nations sources indicate that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas was the leading cause of civilian casualties. Across all conflicts, civilians accounted for 90 per cent of those killed or injured when explosive weapons were used in populated areas. Civilians were also severely affected by widespread damage and destruction to critical infrastructure. That disrupted the provision of electricity, water and health care to millions of people. Across 21 conflicts, more than 2,300 incidents of violence and other forms of interference against medical workers, facilities, equipment, transport and patients were recorded.

Forced displacement also remained a defining feature of armed conflicts. By mid-year, a record-breaking 110 million people globally were in a situation of displacement owing to conflict, persecution, violence and human rights violations or abuses. Sixty per cent were internally displaced.

And conflict was the major driver of staggeringly high levels of hunger. Across 19 conflict-affected countries or territories, 117 million people experienced crisis or higher levels of acute food insecurity.

In the middle of that, the efforts of the humanitarian community to support and provide for the needs of civilians was severely compromised by widespread constraints on access. Besides active hostilities and logistical challenges, chief among those constraints were the parties' bureaucratic impediments and an unconscionable number of attacks harming humanitarian workers.

In 14 conflicts in 2023, not counting the occupied Palestinian territory, 91 humanitarian workers were tragically killed, 120 wounded and 53 abducted. In

Gaza alone, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East lost 142 staff members in the violence between October and December. The United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization lost a staff member each.

I want to take this opportunity to extend my sincere condolences to the families and loved ones of all civilians, including humanitarian workers, killed in conflict this year.

The harm and suffering caused to civilians in 2023 signals an alarming lack of compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It also indicates that the Council's resolutions on the protection of civilians of the past 25 years remain largely unheeded. We must redouble efforts to strengthen compliance by parties to conflict with those obligations. That includes third States taking responsibility for ensuring respect for the rules of war, and it entails political dialogue, training and the dissemination of policies and withholding arms transfers where there is a clear risk that arms will be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law. And while some progress was made in 2023, we must continue to strengthen accountability for violations. That must include upholding the independence and impartiality of the International Criminal Court.

As the Secretary-General sets out in his report (S/2024/385), the reality is that much of the civilian harm we see in today's conflicts is occurring even when parties claim to be acting in compliance with the law. It is time to complement existing measures by adopting a more holistic approach — one that considers the perspective of civilians and takes into account the complex, cumulative and long-term nature of the full range of civilian harm in conflict. We have already seen some important waypoints on that journey. The Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration are both good examples of ways in which States can commit to the greater protection of civilians in armed conflict, complementing their compliance with international humanitarian law. We urge all States to endorse those instruments and implement them in full. We urge them to follow the steps taken by some national and regional authorities in developing and adopting proactive

protection-of-civilians policies, processes and tools aimed at better understanding and mitigating a broader range of civilian harm. And we need States, parties to conflict, United Nations actors and international and civil society organizations to reflect on how we can further develop and implement the full protection-of-civilians approach.

Twenty-five years on from when the Security Council first discussed the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda (see S/PV.3977), much has been achieved. A culture of protection has taken root, and a comprehensive protection framework now exists. Security Council-mandated United Nations peace operations have protected and saved countless civilian lives. Security Council resolutions on the protection of medical care in armed conflict and on conflict and hunger have given important focus and urgency to those issues. Yet in too many conflicts, civilians continue to suffer unacceptable harm. The Security Council and Member States must demand and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the Council's resolutions. And if it is to have any real meaning for the millions of civilians affected by conflict, it is time to go above and beyond compliance to strive for the full protection of civilians against the full range of harm that they are suffering on our watch.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Msuya for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Spoljaric Egger.

**Ms. Spoljaric Egger:** I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to address the Security Council on this important topic.

In 1999, when former International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Cornelio Sommaruga briefed the Council (see S/PV.3977), he spoke of 20 active conflicts. Today there are more than 120 conflicts that have been recorded and classified by my organization. Over the past 25 years and despite the many resolutions adopted by the Council, civilians have been attacked, displaced, violated, wounded or killed by the most reprehensible means. In parallel, there are more and more conflicts in which humanitarian action is prevented. Neutral and impartial providers of humanitarian assistance and protection, such as the ICRC, are regularly pressured in the pursuit of political or military objectives.

What are the means to reverse some of today's most devastating trends? The Geneva Conventions represent the strongest universal consensus on the need to preserve humanity in war. They are key to maintaining a pathway to peace and stability. The principles enshrined in that fundamental legal framework are independent of culture, religion or social status. They constitute a common denominator — a shared understanding that humanity is non-derogable and characterized by the equal worth of all human beings.

Today I want to bring to the Council's attention two issues that are often critical to building trust among warring parties: first, the protection of persons deprived of liberty and those who are at risk of going missing; and secondly, compliance with international humanitarian law.

Regarding the first point, States must take concrete action to protect all people affected by armed conflicts. Through the Geneva Conventions, States have given the ICRC a unique mandate and specific working modalities that enable it to play an effective monitoring role, focused on ensuring that detained persons are treated humanely. Through the ICRC's visits with clearly defined modalities and through confidential bilateral dialogue with detaining authorities, we can bring a critical layer of protection in places of detention. However, we remain deeply concerned about the fact that the dehumanization of persons deprived of liberty is so prevalent. Many continue to be subjected to inhumane treatment and torture, poor detention conditions, having their contact with loved ones cut off or being used as political bargaining chips. When I see our humanitarian access being challenged and our working modalities questioned and when I read accounts of ill-treatment and torture, I must reassert the ICRC's special role and experience to help States to respect the law and preserve humanity in places of detention. And I urgently call on parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law to treat all detained persons humanely and to allow for our principled work.

Closely linked to the question of detention is the risk of persons going missing. When people are detained without being registered and are prevented from communicating with their families, administrative or enforced disappearances are likely to increase. Large numbers of people are at great risk of disappearing as human remains are left in the rubble or abandoned on the battlefield, as they are buried in mass graves

or left in overcrowded morgues and not identified or documented, and as they are taken hostage and used as bargaining chips.

I urge the Security Council to reiterate its call for parties to uphold international humanitarian law and resolution 2474 (2019) to prevent people from going missing in the first place and to clarify the fates of those who have. Amid hostilities and as an integral part of any plan for reconstruction, States must ensure that human remains are recovered, identified and returned to their families in a timely and dignified manner. They must ensure that detained persons are systematically accounted for and their families informed.

Regarding the second point, States must interpret and apply international humanitarian law in a way that genuinely strengthens the protection of civilians on the ground. International humanitarian law is being treated with increased elasticity, and this applies in particular to the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution that govern the conduct of hostilities. That creates a dangerous inconsistency. When civilian lives are stripped of their worth, when important norms that protect civilians are implicitly reduced to more optional guidance and when there is no consideration for the cumulative harm caused to civilians by the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, we lose the proper balance between military necessity and the humanitarian imperative. Restraints in the conduct of hostilities, and ultimately humanity, disappear. International humanitarian law is not a tool for justifying death, endless suffering and devastation. The central purpose of international humanitarian law to protect life and health and to ensure respect for human beings even during wars must be promoted, defended and upheld.

Protecting people affected by armed conflict is first and foremost a matter of compliance with the law. That responsibility lies with political leaders and military strategists, because they have the power to decide on the trajectory of war. Compliance with the law requires resolute policy decisions to prioritize the protection of civilians and other protected persons during armed conflict.

Security Council members, in their sovereign roles, in their partnerships and alliances and as high-contracting parties, have a special responsibility to interpret international humanitarian law in a way that genuinely strengthens the protection of civilians on the



ground. That requires taking deliberate action in cabinets, ministries of defence, training, on the battlefield and in the public space, taking a hard look at the situation of civilians, setting the protection of civilian lives and health as a central guiding objective in the conduct of hostilities, and ensuring that in the inevitable political transactions that occur between parties, international humanitarian law and humanitarian considerations are not used as bargaining chips. States must collectively and individually use their influence to ensure that humanitarian space is respected, humanitarian action proactively enabled and humanitarian access granted, and that humanitarian personnel are protected at all times.

The way forward to any political agreement and long-term stability starts with humanitarian measures such as releasing prisoners and returning human remains. As a neutral intermediary, the ICRC can help implement those steps in order to alleviate suffering and build trust between all sides. For the Security Council, negotiating humanitarian access cannot be a substitute for a lack of political decisions. Humanitarian relief is a lifeline for millions of civilians, but it will not provide the safety that they have a right to and continue to demand. States must commit to full compliance with international humanitarian law and to a true collective responsibility for peace that translates into concrete and positive effects on the ground. People caught in armed conflict need actions, not words.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Spoljaric Egger for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Khadhraoui.

**Mr. Khadhraoui:** I thank Mozambique for inviting me to address the Security Council at this important open debate. It is an honour to speak on behalf of my organization, the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), as the Council marks 25 years since the protection of civilians became a priority on its agenda, and on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. As a Yemeni mother told CIVIC,

“[W]e have never had any advance or early warnings when fighting erupts — no bunkers — and we live close to military bases. We know anything may happen at any time, and we live with that reality and fear on a daily basis”.

She is far from alone in that fear. As wars grow longer and deadlier, civilians are constantly being harmed and targeted by armed actors, with no safe place to go.

Twenty-five years ago, the protection of civilians came into being at the United Nations as a promising tool of the international system for reducing the suffering caused by armed conflict. Yet today civilians are facing risks that are higher than ever. State and non-State armed actors are targeting civilians, violating international humanitarian law with devastating consequences. Civilian casualties are sometimes referred to as the acceptable collateral damage of war. They are killed, displaced and subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and starvation. Technology and disinformation are being weaponized to cause direct harm and fuel conflict. I would like to highlight a few worrisome trends confronting civilians.

With regard to attacks on humanitarian workers, we saw a massive death toll last year. They — we — become targets or collateral damage. One of the consequences is that civilians are denied access to the most basic services — food, health care and water. The targeting of humanitarian workers is an attack on humankind.

Thanks to the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, civilian deaths caused by explosive weapons increased by 122 per cent last year. States are still using cluster munitions, despite their well-known devastating effects on civilians. Schools, hospitals and water and sanitation facilities continue to be targeted, leaving entire areas uninhabitable and driving massive displacement.

Turning to the privatization of war, States are outsourcing security roles to private military and security companies, and in some cases avoiding accountability for harm to civilians. A growing body of research, including our own, links some of those actors to the commission of atrocities, conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking. Those violations often have the tacit acceptance of States.

More than \$2.4 trillion was spent in 2023 on arms transfers and global military expenditures. States are exporting arms around the world while failing to ensure that their weapons are not used where there is an overriding risk that violations of international humanitarian law will be committed. In doing so, they are creating the very conditions that foment more conflict and increase harm to civilians worldwide.

But I believe there is still hope. Courageous civilians and communities are finding ways to survive amid massive human suffering. Humanitarian workers and peacekeepers make tremendous sacrifices to protect civilians where they can. Brave national leaders and forward-looking Member States are placing the protection of civilians at the top of their agendas. This week 23 non-governmental organizations signed a joint statement that stressed the urgent need to close accountability gaps. We must have the political courage and audacity to defend the protection of civilians as a shared goal.

On this twenty-fifth anniversary, echoing my fellow briefers, I propose three concrete actions. First, every Member State should endorse and fully implement the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

Secondly, Member States should immediately cease supplying weapons to partners where there is an overriding risk that they are facilitating violations of international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, each State, together with civil society and communities, must develop a national policy on the protection of civilians. We need to bring back international humanitarian law to where it belongs — to the people affected by armed conflict. There is ample reason and opportunity to profoundly alter our approach. The Security Council must take the lead in ensuring accountability, fighting impunity and avoiding double standards. Reversing the tide of civilian harm in armed conflict is not only a legal and moral responsibility, but it is also central to maintaining international peace and security and strengthening our world economy. We cannot allow this twenty-fifth anniversary to pass without seizing the opportunity to do better. Civilians around the globe are watching us. Their lives depend on our actions today. Let us be accountable. Let us be responsible. We must not let them down.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Khadhraoui for his briefing.

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

**Mr. Gürber** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Seventy-five years ago the Geneva Conventions were adopted in the wake of the horrors of the Second World War. “Our most fervent wish would be that they would

never have the opportunity to be applied”, declared Max Petitpierre, former President of the Swiss Confederation and President of the Diplomatic Conference at which those texts were adopted. Today, 75 years later, we have to acknowledge that that wish has not been fulfilled. The Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional are therefore more relevant than ever.

Switzerland welcomes the convening of today’s open debate. It represents an opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to greater humanity and to recall the obligation that we all have to implement international humanitarian law. We thank the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their briefings, which illustrate the urgency and relevance of our deliberations today.

In his most recent annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385), the Secretary-General draws our attention to a deeply disturbing fact: while armed conflicts around the world are multiplying, international humanitarian law is all too often flouted. I will give just a few examples.

Humanitarian access to Gaza is severely hampered, while half the population suffers from catastrophic hunger and famine is imminent. In the Sudan, we are seeing that the civilian population is being targeted and that sexual violence is being systematically committed as part of the conflict. In Ukraine, mines and explosive remnants of war have killed and maimed hundreds of civilians, including children. In Myanmar, more than 3 million people have been forced to leave their homes since the start of the conflict. Those examples do not illustrate the inevitable corollaries of armed conflict. On the contrary, they are avoidable consequences of a lack of political will to respect international humanitarian law.

Let us protect civilians by unequivocally calling on all parties to conflicts to strictly respect international humanitarian law, everywhere and in all circumstances, even in the absence of reciprocity. Let us protect civilians by demanding rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and protecting those committed to the protection of civilians, as called for in the draft resolution proposed by Switzerland, which is currently being negotiated and will shortly be open for co-sponsorship. Let us protect civilians by

strengthening international humanitarian law through the ratification and implementation of all relevant conventions, in particular the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions. Let us protect civilians by ensuring that justice is done for the victims of violations of international humanitarian law. Switzerland calls on all States to recognize and support the International Criminal Court. Let us protect civilians by improving the prevention of violations of international law and systematically using the early warning instruments at our disposal, for example in relation to famine.

The Geneva Conventions represent the cornerstone of the normative framework we have built, stone by stone, on the rubble of war, to protect civilians and people hors de combat. Every one of us, every State, has an obligation not only to respect international humanitarian law, but also to ensure that it is respected, whether within its own territory or by the parties to the conflict.

Let us assume our responsibilities. Let us seize the opportunity offered by the various anniversaries linked to the protection of civilians that mark this year to call with a strong, united voice for full respect, without nuance or exception, for international humanitarian law, as this world is in desperate need of more humanity.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the presidency of Mozambique for convening today's open debate. We listened with interest to the statements by the briefers.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), which placed the protection of civilians at the centre of the Security Council's attention. We are also commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Conventions, which are the cornerstone of international humanitarian law. The Conventions, the drafting of which involved a significant contribution by my country, lay out the lessons of the Second World War and were largely written in the blood of the people of the Soviet Union, who suffered unprecedented atrocities at the hands of Nazi Germany, including the use of famine as a means of clearing people from territories and seizing resources. Those Conventions laid out the rules for the treatment of civilians, including the obligation to provide them with basic necessities.

Today hunger is being used as a weapon of war in Gaza, with the support and connivance of a number of delegations who are now sitting in this Chamber.

According to the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385), in December 2023, 90 per cent of the residents of Gaza experienced severe food insecurity. The fact that there is a famine in Gaza is now universally recognized. Since the Israeli military took control of the Palestinian part of the Rafah crossing point, the delivery of humanitarian aid has virtually come to a halt. However, the ceasefire that is needed to put an end to the famine has not been achieved. Israel ignored the relevant requirements of resolution 2728 (2024), with some Council members saying they were non-binding.

It is noteworthy that the famine in Gaza is mentioned only on page five of the Secretary-General's report and only in a one paragraph and is not even raised in the section of the report on recommendations, as if famine in Gaza were just another episode among many armed conflicts.

We cannot fail to note that the report mentions the unprecedented level of civilian deaths in Gaza as a result of what it calls Israel's intense military response after the Hamas attack. The report proceeds with an equivocation, as it were either the result of a deliberate or disproportionate attack or the result of legitimate strikes.

The fact that nearly 200 United Nations staff have died in Gaza is unprecedented in the history of the United Nations. Once again, we must ask, are their deaths even being investigated by our Organization? We asked the same question when 13 staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East were fired without any investigation and only on the basis of Israeli accusations. The report does not say a word about that.

A one-sided approach is also evident in other sections of the report. For example, for some reason, it does not mention that part of Syria's territory is occupied by the United States and that occupation is a source of instability and civilian deaths in the country, whose authorities are taking steps to stabilize the situation.

The information in the report pertaining to the situation in Ukraine is yet another regrettable example of double standards.

First, unlike the report's section on Gaza, the Secretary-General fails to point out that Russia's special military operation was launched in response to years of shelling and bombardment of Donbas. We are

being asked to forget about the thousands of civilians, including more than 100 children, who died at the beginning of 2022.

Secondly, it is as if there were no daily strikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure in Donbas, Luhansk, Belgorod and other regions of Russia, using Western weapons. The West does not hesitate to supply depleted uranium shells, cluster munitions and mines that cannot be defused or removed. There are many examples of the use of American high-mobility artillery rocket systems and British Storm Shadow missile systems against civilian targets. As a result of artillery strikes since February 2022, more than 4,600 civilians, including almost 200 children, have been killed and thousands of people, including more than 300 children, have been injured. There have been approximately 100 cases of civilians, including nine children, being blown up by the banned PFM-1 “lepestok” anti-personnel mines, which the Ukrainian armed forces placed in the ground in Donbas. We have found and defused more than 1 million those mines.

The military potential of virtually all NATO countries is being used for targeted strikes, not against military facilities, but rather in densely populated areas and for the destruction of Russia’s civilian population. I will provide a few examples.

On 29 December 2023, there were approximately 300 strikes against civilian objects in the Donetsk People’s Republic, and damage was caused to a school, a technical college, homes and infrastructure. On 30 December, there was a strike on civilian objects in downtown Belgorod. Approximately 25 residents were killed, including five children. In the Donetsk People’s Republic, on the same day, 12 people were injured. From 31 December to 1 January, overnight, the Ukrainian armed forces shelled the centre of Donetsk with a multiple-launch rocket system, injuring 17 civilians. Belgorod was shelled on 2 January. On 5 January, Gorlovka was shelled with cluster munitions. On the eve of the Orthodox Christmas, on 7 January, 15 civilians in the Donetsk People’s Republic were injured by the Ukrainian armed forces shelling. On 15 February, the Ukrainian armed forces struck residential neighbourhoods in Belgorod, killing seven people, including a newborn, and nineteen people were wounded, including four children. A boy was killed in the shelling of a village in the Bryansk region. On 8 January, Belgorod was shelled using a Czech-made Vampire rocket launcher. Recently, on 12 May, the Kyiv

regime shelled Belgorod using Tochka-U and Vilkha multiple-launch rocket systems and a Vampire rocket launcher. After the fifth attack that day, a section of a residential high-rise building collapsed, killing 15 civilians and injuring 17, including a six-week-old infant.

The report states that investigations are currently being conducted by the Kyiv regime, including an investigation into the destruction of the Kakhovka dam as ecocide under the Ukrainian criminal code. I hope that this is an investigation into the activities of the leadership and armed forces of the Zelenskyy regime, who is the perpetrator of that crime. We warned the Secretary-General about that in a letter dated 21 October 2022 (S/2022/786). We trust that there will also be an investigation into the supply of the high-mobility artillery rocket systems, which were used to destroy the dam and which are known to be used in coordination with the suppliers. I would like to reiterate that, in that case as in many others, the responsibility is borne not only by the Zelenskyy regime but also by its Western sponsors, who continue to supply long-range weapons and intelligence to the Kyiv clique and are sending their instructors and mercenaries to Ukraine.

In today’s armed conflicts, a particular threat is posed by terrorist and extremist groups that are waging wars without rules. However, in that context, armed conflicts involving terrorists must be distinguished from situations in which we are combating terrorism and criminal groups. In that regard, we have questions about a certain inconsistency in the way the report qualifies the different situations. For example, in the context of armed conflicts, the report mentions Nigeria, Mozambique, the Niger, Burkina Faso and a number of other African countries, but what we are talking about is combating terrorism. At the same time, the situation in Haiti is overlooked in the report. It would make sense to analyse the role of terrorist and extremist groups in inciting and prolonging conflicts. The unsuccessful attempts of Western countries, in particular France, to counter terrorism in Africa have also in fact led to armed conflict.

I would like to point out, on a positive note, the fact that the report, albeit superficially, mentions the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on humanitarian activities in armed conflict. That is an important point that requires further development. Russia held a special Arria Formula meeting of the Security Council to discuss the negative impact of



unilateral sanctions on combating terrorism. We believe their impact on humanitarian activities in armed conflict must receive due attention by the United Nations. The topic should be the subject of a separate report by the Secretary-General under the agenda item that we are considering now.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): Let me start by thanking Mozambique for convening this important debate and thank all our briefers today for their powerful briefings.

The Secretary-General's most recent report on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) presents a stark picture: a 72 per cent increase in civilian deaths in armed conflict from 2022 to 2023, 117 million people experiencing conflict-related hunger and a tenfold increase in persons with disabilities in Ukraine due to conflict.

The United Kingdom is also concerned about escalating violence in El Fasher, the Sudan, the deaths of civilians in Israel and Gaza, and the shocking levels of conflict-related sexual violence in the central Sahel and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among many other grave situations. We should reverse those trends by taking a comprehensive approach to protection.

I wish to make three points today.

First, warring parties must fully comply with international humanitarian law and uphold their obligations to protect civilians. They must respect the special rights, needs and vulnerabilities of children affected by conflict. We call on States to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. That includes in the Sudan where the United Kingdom's atrocity monitoring work investigates attacks against civilians and infrastructure and monitors hate speech and incitement to violence across the country.

Secondly, we urge all States to take practical steps to improve international humanitarian law and its implementation, which in turn will enhance protection. The United Kingdom is updating its voluntary report on domestic implementation of international humanitarian law with a strong focus on the protection of civilians. We encourage others to undertake similar exercises.

Thirdly, the protection of civilians should always be prioritized in peacekeeping missions. The United Kingdom is supporting peacekeepers with training on preventing conflict-related sexual violence, and its

programming is increasing the participation of women in uniformed roles and helping to address misinformation and disinformation about missions. We call on Member States to deepen their support to peacekeepers to ensure that United Nations peacekeeping remains an effective tool to protect civilians.

In conclusion, I stress the importance of working to prevent conflict. I note that in his long list of events in Ukraine, our Russian colleague forgot to mention the fact that this all could have been prevented without the illegal invasion and aggression against Ukraine.

We must invest in anticipating the risks, working in partnership with national Governments and local organizations to address the drivers of conflict. Progress in that area would go some way to ending the harm facing civilians and communities around the world.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Adviser, the Assistant-Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their briefings.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), the Council's first resolution on the protection of civilians, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. However, the findings of the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) are more alarming than ever. More than 33,000 civilians, the majority of them women and children, died in conflict zones in 2023, an increase of 72 per cent over the previous year. Civilian harm has spread to several regions of the world, in particular Israel and Palestine, where 70 per cent of casualties were reported.

France is alarmed by the increase and exacerbation of humanitarian crises on a global scale in Gaza, Ukraine, the Sudan, Haiti, Yemen and Syria. Deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure, the use of famine as a weapon of war and the obstacles to the delivery of aid are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law.

France is alarmed by the unprecedented attacks on humanitarian personnel and supports the draft resolution submitted by Switzerland to strengthen their protection. The security and freedom of movement of those essential actors must be ensured so that they can fulfil their mission, which is vital to civilian populations affected by conflict. We call for ensuring

respect for international humanitarian law and for the principles of precaution and proportionality in the use of force. Parties to conflicts must focus on seeking just and lasting political solutions to put an end to crises and their catastrophic consequences for civilian populations. In particular, France reaffirms its commitment to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and strongly condemns Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine. The fight against impunity must remain an absolute priority. We invite all Member States to join the call for humanitarian action launched by France and Germany in 2019, which already has 53 signatories. It will be crucial to broaden that coalition to strengthen our joint action to protect civilians.

The protection of civilians cannot be a dead letter. It requires the parties involved in a conflict to demonstrate strong will. It requires concrete action and enhanced international cooperation. France remains determined to play an active role in that regard and calls on all members of the Security Council to take action to put an end to the suffering of civilian populations in conflict zones.

**Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, and Mr. Hichem Khadhraoui for their invaluable insights and recommendations.

Sierra Leone firmly reiterates its full and unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict as a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law and human rights law. This year we are celebrating two seminal global milestones — the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999). Twenty-five years down the road after that resolution's adoption, the Security Council has continued to demonstrate its commitment to ensuring the protection of civilians during conflicts through various resolutions and other Council products that condemn harm inflicted on civilians, including their person, property and other infrastructure that supports their lives and livelihoods, and that promote the prevention of harm to civilians in future and access to humanitarian aid in conflict situations.

Regrettably, as armed conflicts continue to escalate across the globe, civilians continue to bear the brunt of our inability to resolve conflicts and disputes by peaceful means. In 2023 alone, the number of civilian deaths in armed conflicts recorded by the United Nations was at least 33,443, a 72 per cent increase from 2022. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/385) continues to remind us of persistent trends and specific patterns of harm done to civilians in armed conflict and in specific country situations. The alarming rate of civilian casualties in armed conflict is inexcusable and demands an urgent call to action. The report of the Secretary-General paints a grim picture of the state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. From widespread civilian harm, the impact of acute urban warfare and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, attacks on critical infrastructure, the heavy toll taken by landmines and explosive remnants of war, to increasing concerns about the activities of private military and security firms, the imperative to reflect on what it means to protect civilians and take action to prevent or mitigate their exposure to harm, particularly in the context of the New Agenda for Peace, is unquestionable.

Widespread civilian harm, as reported by the Secretary-General in 2023, was aggravated by forced displacement, including multiple displacement, deprivation of medical care, conflict-driven hunger, famine and lack of access to water, and the adverse effects on the environment and climate change. We note with deep concern the increasing lack of protection for specific vulnerable groups — children, people with disabilities, journalists and missing persons. Sexual violence, particularly conflict-related sexual violence, also remains a specific vulnerability of deep concern. The increase of 50 per cent over 2022 of United Nations-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence, with a vast majority of the incidents targeting women and girls, is a regrettable indicator of the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, which can create double victimization, as victims suffer further from a lack of access to medical and psychosocial support within an appropriate time frame.

With respect to peacekeeping, 25 years after the first protection-of-civilians mandated mission in Sierra Leone, designated in resolution 1270 (1999), whereby the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, authorized the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Sierra

Leone “to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence”, we continue to grapple not only with non-compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law but also with conflicts where immense gaps are left in the responsibility to protect civilians owing to the untimely termination of peacekeeping missions. In considering the responsibilities of host countries, we have observed a retreat on the part of some countries hosting peace operations with protection-of-civilian mandates. In noting the value of ensuring the protection of civilians in peacekeeping mandates established by the Security Council, we must make concerted efforts to ensure an effective transfer of responsibilities, with progressive, responsible and honourable disengagements where there are requests for withdrawals or transitionings of peacekeeping operations, particularly in situations with obviously dire implications for civilians. In noting the imperative to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of the protection-of-civilians agenda, we would like to make the following three observations in the context of peacekeeping and peace support operations.

First, peacekeeping missions must function as political tools within the wider context of conflict resolution processes. They must be established on a basis of valid and reliable analysis of the situation on the ground, and they must also operate based on well-articulated mandates with clear terms of reference guiding their operations. The Security Council must authorize missions by giving them the necessary agility, flexibility and resources to respond to rapidly changing dynamics, which are frequently the case in complex conflict situations that often involve very vulnerable civilian populations. Twenty-five years after resolution 1265 (1999), we are of the considered view that all peacekeeping missions should be authorized with a mandate to protect civilians, with the operational managers on the ground guiding the Council and the Secretariat on the types and levels of protection most appropriate in their various contexts.

Secondly, we highlight the importance of early engagement with key stakeholders, including host countries, regional organizations and other interlocutors, from the very first stages of the development and authorization of mandates through to deployment and operationalization for peacekeeping missions and peace support operations. From our experience, when resolution 1270 (1999) was adopted with the first protection-of-civilians mandate, its success in

addressing the appalling catalogue of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law was largely the result of a common understanding and acceptance of the mandate and scope of operations by the Government of Sierra Leone, the Security Council, regional interlocutors and the Mission’s leadership. The early engagement of key stakeholders can be fundamental in developing that common understanding.

Thirdly, and more generally, with the call to strengthen the protection of civilians in the New Agenda for Peace, we agree that there is an opportunity, on this twenty-fifth anniversary of the protection-of-civilians agenda, for deeper reflection on how to address harm to civilians in contemporary armed conflicts and elaborate a meaningful and holistic approach to protecting civilians in armed conflicts.

As civilians continue to endure the deadly effects of armed conflict, exacerbated by new and deadlier forms of weaponry and legal non-compliance, the Council should positively consider the Secretary-General’s recommendations, as contained in his most recent report, to shape the behaviour and actions of States and parties to conflict. There is enough evidence for the Council to be persuaded to act together and galvanize action on a common commitment to protecting civilians in all conflict situations. We therefore conclude by calling on parties to conflict to adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law and to comply with their legal obligation to protect civilians in armed conflict.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): I also want to thank Special Adviser Nderitu and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings and for detailing the developments of the protection of civilians agenda in the most recent annual report of the Secretary-General on the subject (S/2024/385). I would also like to thank President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Spoljaric Egger and the civil society organization representative for their briefings today.

The Security Council has been formally addressing the protection of civilians in armed conflict as a crucial matter of international peace and security for the past 25 years. Slovenia, as a member of the Security Council in 1999, contributed to the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999). The protection of civilians is one of our long-standing priorities, and we appreciate Mozambique for organizing today’s debate. After two and a half decades, the protection of civilians is more relevant than ever.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians and the briefings that we heard today are calls to action to reverse a dangerous trend. Armed conflicts are changing and growing in scale. Children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities are particularly affected. More civilians are being killed. More humanitarian and medical workers helping civilians in conflict are being killed. Other impacts remain multifaceted, profound and long term. The most recent report of the Secretary-General paints a tragic and grim picture: a 70 per cent increase in civilian deaths and a significant increase in conflict-related sexual violence. The fact that the Council has already met twice this year under the protection of civilians agenda item on two situations (see S/PV.9560 and S/PV.9582) and has discussed two white notes on food insecurity speaks for itself.

Seven out of 10 recorded civilian deaths last year occurred in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel. Forced displacement, conflict-driven hunger and denied access to essential goods and services, humanitarian aid and medical care in Gaza are reaching beyond catastrophic levels. After a year of armed conflict, the Sudan faces the world's worst displacement crisis and is on the verge of famine and, as we heard today, genocide. The escalating violence around El Fasher has deepened the crisis, trapping people in a cycle of relentless bloodshed, hunger and a desperate struggle for survival.

As the world continues to urbanize, so too do armed conflicts, which has devastating consequences for civilian life, infrastructure, services and cultural property. Targeting and destroying civilian critical infrastructure, as we are witnessing on a daily basis in Ukraine, is a violation of international humanitarian law. Landmines and explosive remnants of war hinder hope for a safe return of refugees and post-conflict recovery. We heard this week that Ukraine has become one of the most mine-infested countries and that it would take decades to make it mine-safe again for civilians (see S/PV.9629).

The impact of armed conflicts on freshwater, water-related installations and water services is leaving millions of civilians without safe water, posing grave humanitarian, development and environmental challenges. More awareness-raising is needed, and Slovenia intends to join others in launching a global alliance to spare water from armed conflicts later this week.

This year we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions — the core of international humanitarian law. And yet we are witnessing an erosion of respect for international humanitarian law, an erosion of the protection of civilians and an erosion of the respect and protection of humanitarian and medical organizations and workers. We should use this anniversary as an opportunity to renew our commitment to full respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law. However, our commitment should not be abstract, but rather very concrete. It should not be words, but actions, to end with the words of the President of the ICRC.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I thank Ms. Nderitu, Ms. Msuya, Ms. Spoljaric Egger and Mr. Khadhraoui for their alarming briefings. I would also like to thank Mozambique for convening this annual yet timely debate.

As we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the protection of civilians agenda here at the Security Council, as well as the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, it is distressing that those significant milestones are not accompanied by an increase in the successful protection of innocent lives worldwide. The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385) paints a grim picture of civilians in armed conflict. It is alarming that the United Nations recorded more than 33,000 civilian deaths in armed conflict in 2023 — a 72 per cent increase compared with those in 2022. The current trend of the erosion of the principles of international humanitarian law is nothing but disheartening.

Despite that insecure environment, many United Nations and humanitarian workers and non-governmental organizations are striving to protect civilians. Japan pays the utmost tribute to them, and we emphasize that their safety must be ensured as well. Japan calls on all States to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, including those who are recruited locally. In that regard, Japan appreciates Switzerland's leadership in producing the draft resolution on the protection of humanitarian and United Nations personnel. Japan believes that it is critical to reaffirm the Council's commitment to international humanitarian law.

Respect for international humanitarian law is an obligation for all parties to conflicts. It has become increasingly challenging to ensure compliance and



accountability under international humanitarian law, and many civilians are injured, killed, starved and forced to live without hope because of disregard for the rule of law. There is also no excuse for States to ignore the principles of international humanitarian law, under any circumstance, anywhere.

We must recall that international humanitarian law was created in order to preserve the dignity of people, both combatants and civilians. As a strong advocate for human security, as well as women and peace and security, Japan is committed to ensuring the dignity of all persons, including civilians, especially women and girls, in armed conflict. An example of our support in that context is Japan's assistance for mine action. As the report of the Secretary-General indicates, landmines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war are posing a grave danger to civilians, including innocent children. In 2023, Japan provided a total of approximately \$67 million in mine assistance, distributed across 20 countries around the world through the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Mine Action Service and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, as a co-penholder of resolution 2286 (2016), Japan emphasizes the importance of protecting medical personnel and facilities and ensuring their safe passage in conflict zones. The fact that more than 2,370 incidents of violence and interference involving medical workers and facilities all over the world were recorded last year underscores the urgency of the issue.

In conclusion, Japan is committed to continuing to work closely with the United Nations, international humanitarian organizations and civil society organizations in order to contribute to the effort to protect civilians.

**Mrs. Frazier** (Malta): I would like to begin by thanking Mozambique for organizing today's open debate on this very important topic. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya, President Mirjana Spoljaric Egger of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Mr. Khadhraoui for the reality check that they have given us this morning, but also for their words of hope.

Resolution 1265 (1999) constitutes a landmark text in our collective commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption, we must

carefully reflect on the current realities of civilians trapped in conflict around the globe and address the significant challenges that we are facing in the implementation of resolution 1265 (1999) today.

Just as in 1999, civilians are not only victims of war but are regarded as instruments of war. Across the globe, the starvation, rape, torture, terrorizing and murder of civilians are still seen as legitimate. Neither sex nor age serves as a defence. Today, just as in 1999, women, children and the elderly continue to be disproportionately affected by conflict. Resolution 1265 (1999) emerged from one of the darkest periods in recent history, when the international community was reeling from the horrors of genocide, such as we saw in Rwanda, and severe humanitarian crisis, as we saw in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Angola and East Timor. The adoption of the resolution marked a pivotal moment in our understanding of and response to the plight of civilians caught in the crossfire of war. It signalled a commitment to our shared humanity. Regrettably, that commitment has waned in the ensuing 25 years. Despite the development of the vast range of instruments that our multilateral system has to offer when it comes to protecting civilians, they have rarely been used in a timely and effective manner. We have seen that over the past 25 years in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, to name just a few countries. That failure continues today.

In Gaza, thousands of civilians have been killed or injured in the past six months. An entire population is facing human-made starvation. Nearly all the hospitals in Gaza have been systematically dismantled. The scale of human suffering is an affront to everything the United Nations stands for. In the Sudan, we are witnessing the largest refugee and internal displacement crisis in the world. There are fears that the ethnic cleansings that took place in 2005 are re-emerging, while conflict-induced hunger is stalking some 18 million people. The Rapid Support Forces are encircling the city of El Fasher in Darfur, with close to 1 million internally displaced persons facing a potential massacre that we must avert.

While we have deployed robust frameworks and tools since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), the gap between our ideals and the reality on the ground persists. The hard lessons that we have learned from past genocides underscore the vital role of accountability. Without it, our resolutions are merely words. It is

imperative that the Council utilize every tool at its disposal to ensure compliance with the international laws designed to protect civilians. At the same time, humanitarian solutions cannot supplant the critical need for true diplomacy and brave political decision-making.

As we reflect on the past 25 years, let us reaffirm our commitment to the principles enshrined in resolution 1265 (1999), ensuring that they are more than aspirations and that they can become realities for the millions of civilians whose lives depend on our actions. Let us not be passive in the face of the notion that might makes right. In the words of the late former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, speaking to the Council 25 years ago,

“Those who founded the United Nations believed that, despite a bloodied history, humanity was ultimately redeemable.” (S/PV.4046, *p.4*).

For us, as committed multilateralists, those inspiring words of hope continue to serve as our guiding light. We stand firm in our belief that dialogue and diplomacy hold the key to the challenges we continue to face. Cynicism must never be allowed to prevail. In reaffirming our commitment to resolution 1265 (1999), let us translate our words into actions. In that regard, we commend the work of the Swiss delegation in drafting a new resolution on the protection of civilians and the people who assist them in situations of conflict, and we hope to see that text finalized and adopted by consensus in the near future.

In conclusion, by operating with bravery, justice and consistency, we can protect the most vulnerable in conflict zones and restore the credibility of the Council in the eyes of the world.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this timely meeting on an issue pertinent to the maintenance of international peace and security. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Nderitu, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya, President Ms. Spoljaric Egger of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Mr. Khadhraoui of the Center for Civilians in Conflict for their comprehensive briefings on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) 25 years ago signalled the international community's recognition of and commitment to the protection of civilians during armed conflicts and underscored the necessity of compliance with international humanitarian law,

including as codified in the Geneva Conventions. Resolution 1265 (1999) has been instrumental in shaping the mandates of peacekeeping missions over the years, and several Council products and other instruments have contributed to a robust framework that addresses a number of matters concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Resolutions 2286 (2016), 2417 (2018), 2474 (2019) and 2573 (2021) are notable in that regard.

However, as we have seen in several countries with ongoing armed conflicts, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Palestine and the Sudan, the road to the implementation of resolution 1265 (1999) is fraught with obstacles, including the rise of non-State actors and the increasing use of misinformation and disinformation as a tool of war and of asymmetric warfare tactics. That has resulted in the deaths of millions of civilians and disrupted the lives of millions more, especially women and children. It is also evident in the destruction of critical infrastructure, displacement and lack of access to life-saving and essential services. The challenges associated with the provision of some of those services are further exacerbated by the effects of climate change, compounding the already precarious position in which many civilians in situations of armed conflict find themselves.

The lack of implementation of resolution 1265 (1999) could also be attributed to the increasingly relative approach that some actors have taken to the interpretation of international humanitarian law, which was designed to maintain the sanctity of life and modulate the conduct of war. The subjective application of international humanitarian law is self-serving and deviates from the objective for which that body of law was developed. Let us remember that all humans are created equal and must be so treated in the application of the law. When the indiscriminate use of force, the targeting of non-combatants and the destruction of essential infrastructure are allowed to take place—in some cases, with impunity—while accountability is demanded in others, it is an affront to the dignity of the human being and perpetuates the dangerous idea that not all humans are created equal. It is therefore important that interpretation and application of international humanitarian law and the principles enshrined therein prioritize the safety and dignity of all civilians. That is critical for reducing or mitigating the impact of armed conflicts on people's well-being.

The challenges adumbrated represent a fraction of the obstacles faced in ensuring the protection of civilians in armed conflict. However, they are not insurmountable, and global efforts must intensify if we are to overcome them. The protection of humanitarian personnel is also a critical part of the broader framework regarding the protection of civilians. Given the important role that humanitarian personnel play in conflict situations, it is incumbent upon us to guarantee their protection in the execution of their duties. Guyana is therefore supportive of the initiative currently being led by Switzerland to develop a Security Council resolution on the protection of humanitarians. We look forward to a consensus adoption.

In conclusion, the observance of the twenty-fifth year of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) is an opportune moment for the international community, including United Nations agencies and other international organizations, to renew their commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1265 (1999). Bearing in mind that thousands of lives are lost to the scourge of war, let us collectively resolve to act in order to improve the protection of civilians. Further, let us resolve to root our actions in truth, accountability and adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and to international law, including international humanitarian law. While it is true that the protection of civilians is a legal obligation, it is also a moral imperative. The fate of humankind in many parts of the globe hinges on that realization.

**Mr. De La Gasca** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): The protection of civilians in armed conflict is an integral element of my country's foreign policy and constitutes one of its priorities as an elected member of the Security Council, as Ecuador has demonstrated when conflict situations have been discussed in this organ. I therefore thank the presidency of Mozambique for organizing this debate, as well as the speakers for their statements.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and the upcoming celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the progress made in the protection of civilians, but also on its challenges. The evolution of the Council's approach to the protection of civilians, from its initial recognition as a matter of peace and security, in 1999, to its prioritization as a central item on its agenda, in

2019, has made possible the development of thematic and specific actions.

We now have a solid normative framework for protection based on international law and firmly rooted in the work of the Council. That is reflected in the adoption of resolutions condemning attacks on medical facilities and seeking to break the vicious circle between conflict and famine and ensure the protection of critical civilian infrastructure. In that context, I wish to reiterate my delegation's support for the Swiss proposal aimed at bolstering the protection of humanitarian workers.

The Council has also developed tools for the protection of civilians, including protection mandates in peace operations; designation criteria in sanctions regimes, monitoring and reporting processes, and accountability mechanisms for war criminals.

However, those advances cannot hide a painful reality — the world is experiencing more and more conflicts, with increasingly devastating consequences for the population. In his report (S/2024/385), the Secretary-General describes the state of civilian protection in 2023 as “resoundingly grim”, being the deadliest year in the last 30 years, with one in five children living in or fleeing conflict. That reality will not change unless we take action to achieve tangible improvements in the protection of civilians.

In that context and in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report, my delegation stresses four elements.

First, there is an urgent need to match the development of norms with their effective implementation. It is incumbent upon the Security Council to ensure that all Member States, as well as all parties to armed conflict, respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including allowing and facilitating unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance.

Secondly, with regard to impunity, the perpetrators of crimes against civilians must know that they will be brought to justice, an obligation incumbent on States and international justice mechanisms. I underline the role of the International Criminal Court in that connection.

Thirdly, the Security Council must develop a consistent vision for the implementation of civilian protection mandates, particularly in peacekeeping operation authorizations and must avoid fragmentation.

Finally, Ecuador supports the vision focused on prevention and early warning for civilian protection mandates, which requires the cooperation of military, police and civilian components, as well as adequate funding.

Twenty-five years ago, with the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), the Council made a commitment to protect civilians in armed conflict. We have made significant progress, but for many peoples that commitment remains unfulfilled. That is why I believe that this commitment cannot be a dead letter.

The notion that civilian victims are an undesired but inevitable consequence of conflict must end, and that will be possible only with the firm political will of all Governments, respect for international humanitarian law and the support of the United Nations.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): As President of the Council for the 2013 open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV.6917) and as the first country to request that the Secretary-General regularly report on this matter to the Council, we greatly value today's meeting. I would also like to thank all the briefers for sharing their insights.

Over the past 25 years, the Security Council has developed a comprehensive framework for norms related to the protection of civilians and has translated them into concrete protections on the ground. Notably, that has been achieved by incorporating protection-of-civilians elements into peacekeeping operation mandates, and all such active mandates were authorized under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. That demonstrates that the Council considers the protection of civilians a priority for ensuring international peace and security.

Nevertheless, statistics show a grim picture on the ground. The Secretary-General's recent report on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) revealed, disturbingly, that more than 33,000 innocent lives were lost during armed conflicts last year — a 72 per cent increase compared to 2022. In addition, the world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since the Second World War, and a quarter of humankind now lives in places affected by such conflicts.

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) and 75 years since the Geneva Conventions, we must bridge the gap between ideals

and reality and reinvigorate our protection-of-civilians strategy for the next 25 years.

I would like to underline the following points in that regard.

First, the Security Council should adopt a strategic approach to protection-of-civilians mandates in peacekeeping missions. Full implementation of comprehensive protection-of-civilians mandates has been challenged by the limited resources of the missions. Finding the correct balance between the two should be at the centre of the Council's considerations. The Council's new strategic approach should also tackle emerging protection-of-civilians challenges, such as misinformation and disinformation and cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, as those impact various aspects of civilian protection.

Secondly, during the closure and drawdown of peacekeeping missions with protection-of-civilians mandates, we must secure the protection of civilians during and after transitions. The Council could support strengthening protection-of-civilians capabilities and the expertise of key stakeholders, including host countries, in that regard.

Host countries should also be encouraged to engage with the Peacebuilding Commission, which can assist transitions to strengthen governance, security and the rule of law and the prevention of conflicts. In that regard, the Council should work more closely with the Peacebuilding Commission, especially ahead of the Council's consideration of mandates renewals for peacekeeping operations.

Thirdly, States bear the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. As affirmed at the World Summit in 2005, States have a responsibility to protect their populations from international crimes. The international community should help States to exercise that responsibility. The Council should also promote national accountability mechanisms, policies and institutions for the protection of civilians and help national judiciaries to hold perpetrators accountable through capacity-building initiatives.

Fourthly, the Security Council must enhance accountability for perpetrators of crimes related to the protection of civilians with a view to deterring violations by using sanction regimes and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Many conflict-related sanction regimes include violations of international humanitarian law



as designation criteria. The consistent application of that criteria should send a clear signal to the parties to conflict.

The Council can also refer situations to the ICC when crimes against humanity and war crimes appear to have been committed. As a staunch supporter of the ICC, Korea urges Council members to refrain from politicizing the narrative around the ICC and to empower it to fulfil its role of ending impunity for the gravest crimes.

Lastly, we must increase humanitarian assistance to address underfunding, while ensuring that it is delivered more effectively. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, humanitarian projects face significant funding gaps, with only 42 per cent of required funding received in 2022. In that context, Korea has increased its humanitarian budget this year to nearly 2.5 times the previous amount.

We should also promote the more effective delivery of humanitarian assistance through various ways, such as direct support to beneficiaries; the usage of new technologies, such as information and communications technologies and drones; and the promotion of public-private partnerships.

In conclusion, today's discussion serves as a poignant reminder of the crucial importance and gravity of the protection of civilians. Throughout its term on the Security Council, the Republic of Korea will actively contribute to identifying concrete ways to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, thereby saving the lives of those impacted by the gravest of realities.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I wish to thank our briefers for their very informative briefings.

We mark yet another tragic year for hundreds of thousands of civilians around the world who were killed or harmed in armed conflict.

Seventy-five years ago, with the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the world established international legal standards to mitigate the suffering of civilians caught in the crossfires of war. And 25 years ago, the Council called upon the world to recognize the need to take concrete action to protect the most vulnerable. We adopted resolution 1265 (1999) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

In recent years, many United Nations peacekeeping operations have spearheaded efforts to protect civilians in the conflict areas where they are deployed.

The protection of civilians is the top priority in the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. For nearly a decade, the Mission has worked to promote security and stability throughout the Central African Republic by deterring violence by armed groups, facilitating the safe delivery of humanitarian aid, supporting the peace process and promoting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration — all mutually reinforcing activities that make civilians safer and increase the prospect of peace.

Likewise, the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) prioritizes the protection of civilians, including supporting the safety of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and others affected by violence. MONUSCO maintains blocking positions around the city of Goma, protecting the area from the Mouvement du 23 mars armed group and ensuring the continued delivery of aid to IDP sites.

Just this month peacekeepers in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan conducted day and night patrols in Tambura, Western Equatoria state, after an outbreak of intercommunal violence led to the need to protect newly displaced persons in South Sudan. In responding to intercommunal violence in a late January in Abyei, a contested border area between the Sudan and South Sudan, that led to scores of civilian casualties, two peacekeepers — one Ghanaian and one Pakistani — lost their lives and several other United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei personnel were injured.

In looking at the situations in Haiti and the Sudan, the international community is grappling with how to develop new tools to deal with this age-old challenge. In the face of destabilizing and deadly gang violence in Haiti, the Security Council came together to authorize the Multinational Security Support mission, which, under Kenya's leadership, may deploy soon.

In Darfur, 20 years ago, the United Nations and the African Union came together to protect civilians through the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. And now, the people of Darfur and other civilians across the Sudan are facing horrific violence, which once again demands that the

international community consider what tools it can use to ensure that civilians in Darfur are protected today.

Today we recognize the importance of redoubling our efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict worldwide and the centrality of that work to the institution of the United Nations. The Council must once again call upon all parties to fulfil their international legal obligations related to the protection of civilians, as well as the principles of international humanitarian law.

Today the United States reaffirms its commitment to those standards. We are working with partners around the world to share best practices, learn from one another and work together to protect civilians who are directly targeted by combatants or indirectly made to bear the brunt of violent conflict.

Protecting civilians is the moral obligation of all and the foundation of international humanitarian law. It is our duty as members of the Council to uphold the protection of civilians as we strive towards a more peaceful and secure world under the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mr. Fu Cong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome Mozambique's initiative in convening this meeting. I thank Special Adviser Nderitu, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya, President Spoljaric Egger and the civil society representative for their briefings.

Historic resolution 1265 (1999), adopted by the Council 25 years ago, provides important guiding principles on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Over the years, the protection of civilians has become a top priority on the Council's agenda, and the Council has adopted a number of resolutions on the protection of vulnerable groups, including women, children and persons with disabilities. Yet to this day, acts that harm civilians in armed conflict are still widespread. As pointed out in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385), from the Middle East to North Africa, from Europe to Latin America, and from the Horn of Africa to the Sahel region, numerous civilians are still suffering as a result of conflict, and civilian casualties have risen significantly since last year. The harsh reality reminds us to take stronger actions to protect civilians and to do so with a greater sense of urgency. Let me emphasize the following points.

First, eliminating all armed conflict is the best protection for civilians. While saving lives in armed conflict is a noble goal, it must be noted that, until

conflicts have ended, the lives of civilians are under constant threat. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the Security Council's primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security. The several months of hostilities in Gaza have resulted in unprecedented civilian casualties and a humanitarian catastrophe. As we speak, millions of people who have gathered in Rafah to seek refuge are on the brink of death. An urgent priority for the Council is to facilitate an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire. And to that end, the Council should take further action and urge Israel to immediately stop its collective punishment of the Palestinian people and to stop pursuing its military attacks on Rafah, so as to offer hope of survival to the people on the ground.

Secondly, international humanitarian law is the bottom line that must be adhered to by all. Civilians and civilian infrastructure can never be the target of military operations. In conflict situations, it is imperative to guarantee safe and unhindered humanitarian access and ensure the safety and security of humanitarian agencies and their staff. Humanitarian assistance must not be politicized. Basic goods such as food and medicine must not be weaponized. In occupied territories, the occupying Power is obligated to protect the safety and security of civilians and meet their humanitarian needs. Today, in the twenty-first century, those universally recognized basic norms of international humanitarian law have been breached time and again, and we must therefore remain vigilant. The Council should continue to uphold the authority of international humanitarian law and ensure its universal and consistent application. Double standards and the selective application of international humanitarian law are unacceptable and are tantamount to condoning more violations.

Thirdly, serious efforts should be made to address outstanding challenges posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the development of autonomous weapon systems. The illicit trafficking in and misuse and irresponsible transfer of small arms and light weapons have exacerbated armed conflicts. China calls for a strengthening of the global governance of the arms trade. We believe in a responsible arms trade and the need to combat the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons. We call on all countries to refrain from supplying weapons to non-State actors. For some time now, a steady flow of illicit weapons has driven rampant gang violence in Haiti. Relevant countries should strictly implement the arms embargo imposed

by the Council on Haiti and should shoulder their responsibility for stabilizing the security situation and guaranteeing the safety and security of the population. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, the risk of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems being used as a means of warfare is on the rise, and we should pay it greater attention. Following a human-centred principle of using artificial intelligence to benefit all, countries should work to ensure that artificial intelligence always remains under human control. China supports the development of a legally binding international instrument on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Fourthly, improving the governance capacity of conflict-affected countries is the ultimate solution. At the end of the day, national Governments have the primary responsibility for protecting the safety and security of their own people. In dealing with complex situations, the international community must take systematic measures in the light of the realities of conflict-afflicted countries and support them in strengthening their national defence, security and counter-terrorism capacities through security sector reforms. At the same time, assistance must be provided to the countries concerned to accelerate their development, promote employment, reduce poverty, improve the capacity of public service delivery and gradually address the deep-seated causes of conflict. United Nations peacekeeping operations should also consider incorporating the capacity-building of countries concerned into their transition strategies early on, so as to create conditions for the gradual withdrawal of peacekeeping operations.

China always attaches great importance to the protection of civilians. Over the years, China has actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations and, within the framework of South-South cooperation, China has been helping developing countries to strengthen their governance capabilities. Together with the international community, we will continue our unrelenting efforts to eliminate the scourge of war at an early date, to ensure peaceful and happy lives.

**Mr. Koudri** (Algeria): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this crucial meeting. Our gratitude goes to the briefers for their insightful interventions and to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2024/385).

That report lays bare the alarming reality of civilians who continue to suffer under the scourge of armed conflict, with a staggering 72 per cent increase in civilian casualties compared to 2022. It is a most unfortunate situation, as we celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of landmark resolution 1265 (1999), which places the protection of civilians in conflict areas at the forefront of the Security Council's agenda.

Although that legal framework is universally acknowledged as mandatory, we bear witness to how the occupying Power in the occupied Palestinian territories bends it and flouts it with impunity. Israeli occupying forces have deliberately targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure. That is a fact. There have been more than 35,303 fatalities, 32 per cent of them children; 171 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East installations targeted; 493 health workers killed; 193 United Nations staff killed; and 147 journalists and media workers killed. Those figures are increasing as we speak.

That policy constitutes a war crime and collective punishment. Starving innocent civilians or directly targeting them is explicitly prohibited by international humanitarian law, which forbids any form of collective punishment against civilian populations. They aim to eliminate an entire people and strip them of their remaining legitimate rights, foremost among them the rights to life, to self-determination and to establish their State on their land in accordance with the provisions of international law.

The situation in Gaza raises the fundamental question as to the *raison d'être* of the rule of law if it cannot protect the most sacred of existences — the lives of civilians. That brings us to the larger problem of how to ensure that all parties to a conflict adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law. In the absence of a deterrent mechanism that compels parties to seriously consider the consequences of violating the law, strengthening compliance with those laws must be central to the protection of civilians agenda and must be rendered truly effective.

To that end, we emphasize the following points.

First, full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law is the cornerstone of ensuring the protection of civilians. We

stress the importance of adopting a mechanism through which the Security Council is automatically notified of any flagrant and documented violation of international humanitarian law.

Secondly, there must be accountability for all those who have violated international humanitarian law. The multilateral system must be empowered to end impunity and ensure compliance with international law.

Thirdly, a comprehensive approach that ensures all efforts at all levels are directed towards facilitating communication, coordination and access to necessary humanitarian assistance must be adopted.

Fourthly, mobilizing the necessary resources and assistance is an urgent necessity to meet the growing needs of civilians in conflict areas. We stress the need for all donors to fulfil their obligations in providing the necessary assistance and to refrain from prioritizing some relief efforts over others.

Finally, all proposals regarding the protection of civilians in conflict areas and the facilitation of humanitarian access remain partial solutions unless the root causes are addressed and sustainable solutions to conflicts are found in a way that ensures the stability and security of all countries.

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

At the outset, I wish to reaffirm Mozambique's sincere and profound gratitude to Her Excellency Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide; Her Excellency Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General; Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Mr. Hichem Khadhraoui, Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict. We thank them for their passionate and illuminating insights. We wish to extend our heartfelt condolences to and solidarity with the families of the countless victims of conflict worldwide. Our appreciation also goes to the thousands of selfless and tireless humanitarian and aid workers. Their dedication to the noble cause of assisting those in difficult and painful conditions represents the better angels of our nature.

As we gather today for this open debate, it is disheartening to recall that thousands of civilians are defencelessly caught up in different armed conflicts around the world. Today's debate is about human-made

human tragedies. Behind every number relating to a death or injury lies a trail of hardship, sorrow, loss and bereavement that leaves in its wake lifelong trauma and an uphill struggle to recover and overcome the painful present. Today's debate also seeks to reaffirm that, for the Council and for the conscience of the world, the indiscriminate or targeted killing of children, women and other civilians, the taking of hostages and the use of hunger and rape as weapons of war fall into a forbidden domain of human behaviour.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of landmark resolution 1265 (1999), which, for a quarter of a century, has been a beacon of hope for humankind. It continues to guide our efforts aimed at the higher goal of protecting civilians who are trapped in the horrors of conflict. As we commemorate that milestone, let us reflect on the progress made so far and the formidable challenges ahead of us. This year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385) makes for sobering and grim reading. We wish to take this opportunity to highly praise the Secretary-General for his devotion to the Charter of the United Nations and to the respect and defence of human persons anywhere in the world, in particular those in situations of conflict. We commend his tireless efforts in highlighting the centrality of human values and of international humanitarian law.

In 2023, we witnessed a staggering 72 per cent increase in civilian deaths compared to the previous year. That is despite the advances in military technology and the increased reliance on uncrewed weaponry, which, as is claimed, is supposed to allow for more precision and the avoidance of collateral damage. The devastation in Gaza, Israel, the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine and other regions has been particularly severe. Furthermore, attacks on critical infrastructure, including health-care facilities, water systems and essential services, have exacerbated civilian suffering and hindered access to vital services.

Conflicts continue to be the primary driver of forced displacement, with the number of people around the world who find themselves in that situation now at a record-breaking 110 million. To compound the gravity of the situation, a disturbingly large number of humanitarians and aid workers are themselves deliberate targets of violence, hostage-taking and killings. We want to emphasize that most of what those humanitarian workers do in the field relies on a presumption of immunity to the vagaries of war so



that unimpeded access to those in greatest need is ensured. We therefore urge Council members to allow swift passage of the draft resolution currently being negotiated under Switzerland's penholdership.

The truth remains, and our experience in Mozambique shows, that the best way to protect civilians in armed conflict is by bringing those conflicts to an end. We therefore call on the Security Council to persist in its efforts to achieve a cessation of hostilities in all conflicts worldwide. My own country, Mozambique, especially in its northern regions, has not been spared. The terrorist attacks that we have seen since October 2017 have led to the internal displacement of more than 1 million people. The Government of Mozambique has taken significant steps in that regard, including approving legislation establishing the Local Force as a self-defence mechanism to protect civilian communities and local infrastructure from terrorist attacks in Cabo Delgado. Mozambique is grateful to all the humanitarian agencies and bilateral partners that have been working side by side with us to protect civilians against terrorism and violent extremism.

We would like to conclude our statement on a note of tribute to the United Nations for the Organization's extraordinary work in the humanitarian field. We also pay tribute to all our colleagues in the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and to our friend Mr. Martin Griffiths himself in particular.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Security Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphone will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after three minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

**Mr. Šimonović** (Croatia): I thank the briefers for their insightful interventions.

Croatia aligns itself with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect and the Global Alliance for the Missing. I would also like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

As we mark 25 years of the Security Council's consideration of the protection of civilians as an item

on its agenda, we should look back to see what we have learned and forward to see how we can apply those lessons and what each United Nations body and Member State can do to advance protection. The numbers of those who are missing, displaced or dead as a result of conflict continue to grow, as we have seen from the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/385). We must seek out opportunities to mainstream prevention and protection. We have a few very concrete opportunities ahead. Our discussions on the Pact for the Future should result in a document that gives great importance to prevention and protection. The upcoming 2025 review of the peacebuilding architecture should further improve the work of the United Nations on peacebuilding. The Security Council can improve its cooperation with other bodies, including the Peacebuilding Commission and the Economic and Social Council. We can also strive to better utilize the concept of the responsibility to protect and in more effective and non-controversial ways.

We often hear that in the humanitarian context we are now facing a situation that is worse than we ever have seen. Unresolved conflicts, instability, climate change, disease and economic inequality continue to keep millions in a state of protracted crisis, stretching humanitarians to the brink. Against that challenging backdrop, Croatia has the honour and the responsibility to chair the Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS) of the Economic and Social Council, which will take place in June and among other things will focus on strengthening humanitarian assistance and respect for international humanitarian law. While preparing for the HAS, we have received a strong message from delegations from all around the world that protection has to be one of our priorities. I firmly believe that we all can agree on that.

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

**Mrs. Dostert** (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg is grateful to Mozambique for organizing this open debate. I thank all the briefers for their insights and recommendations this morning.

Luxembourg fully aligns itself with the statements to be made on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, and I would like to add a few points in my national capacity.

Twenty years after the issue of the protection of civilians was placed on the Security Council's agenda and a few months ahead of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, civilians are being targeted by unacceptable violence. From Afghanistan to the Sudan, from Ukraine to Iraq and from the Central African Republic to Gaza, tens of thousands of civilians have been killed or injured and millions forcibly displaced. Preserving humanitarian space has become an insurmountable challenge.

The evidence is clear that what is lacking is not standards but rather a willingness to apply them. Widespread impunity directly undermines the protection of civilians. We must do everything possible to ensure that the perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law are held accountable for their actions and that justice is delivered for victims and survivors, who must be at the centre of our efforts. In that respect, Luxembourg underscores the indispensable role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a court of last resort. We condemn in the strongest terms any threats, acts of intimidation or reprisals against the ICC, its Prosecutor and all its staff. Attacks on humanitarian personnel are increasing. Such attacks are illegal and unacceptable, and we condemn them all in the strongest terms. Luxembourg welcomes and supports Switzerland's work on a draft resolution on the protection of humanitarian workers and hopes that the Council will be able to adopt it unanimously this week, because it is more necessary than ever.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming Luxembourg's full support for the crucial mandate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We are proud to have been able to strengthen our strategic partnership with the ICRC with the opening in Luxembourg of an ICRC office dedicated to cybersecurity. It can continue to count on our support.

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

**Mr. Sekeris** (Greece): We would like to thank Mozambique for this timely open debate, as this year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of landmark resolution 1265 (1999), as well as the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

Greece aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union and would like to add the following in its national capacity.

I shall start by wholeheartedly thanking our briefers for their very interesting yet sobering presentations.

Regrettably, conflicts remain one of the major causes of human suffering. In fact, the findings of the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2024/385) are sobering: in 2023 there was a 72 per cent increase in civilian deaths, compared with the previous year, with women and children bearing the brunt in various conflicts around the world.

We are gravely concerned about the situation in the Middle East, with thousands of civilians killed and injured in the heinous 7 October attacks by Hamas on Israel and Israel's subsequent military operation in Gaza. We add our voice to the call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages and the unhindered flow of humanitarian aid, as stipulated in resolution 2728 (2024).

The key to preventing the suffering of civilians is preventing conflict. Nevertheless, when our peacekeeping efforts fail, full compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law remains critical, and all parties to an armed conflict, even non-State actors, should abide by humanitarian principles.

Moreover, no effort should be spared to ensure humanitarian access to those in need. We have to safeguard that no attacks against civilian infrastructure take place, and the safety of humanitarian personnel should remain our top priority. With children and women among the most vulnerable populations during conflict and the main victims of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence, we need to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of such crimes and promote the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda.

A particularly vulnerable category of civilians are journalists. According to UNESCO, 71 journalists were killed in 2023. Greece, together with France, initiated the adoption of resolution 1738 (2006) in December 2006, during our previous term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. The resolution outright condemns attacks against journalists in conflict situations. Since then, we have remained committed to the protection of journalists, including by facilitating the biennial General Assembly resolution on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

In conclusion, let me stress that, while humanitarian assistance is essential, peace will always be the solution to civilian suffering. The protection of civilians is a shared and global responsibility of all United Nations Member States. With that in mind, my country, as a candidate for a non-permanent seat at the Security Council for 2025-2026, if elected, will engage constructively, along with the other members of the Security Council, particularly the 10 elected members of the Security Council to further promote the protection of civilians agenda in the Council's deliberations.

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

**Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*):** I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and Mozambique's presidency of the Security Council for convening this important meeting, and I thank the briefers for their valuable briefings.

Today's meeting comes amid continued many armed conflicts, wars and political instability that deeply affect civilians and exacerbate their suffering due to multiple challenges, such as natural disasters, famine and others.

Regrettably, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385) confirms the high civilian casualties as a result of the continuation of armed conflicts and highlights, in particular, the suffering of the Palestinians, noting that last year recorded the largest number of Palestinian civilians martyrs in the occupied Palestinian territories since 2005, which is the largest number of civilian casualties in conflicts worldwide and demonstrates the serious violations committed against the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights.

Israel violates international law as it continues the illegal aggression it launched against the Gaza Strip in October 2023, claiming the lives of more than 34,000 martyrs, mostly women and children, and injuring 78,000 others. It has also destroyed 60 per cent of residential buildings, and most of the hospitals in the Gaza Strip are now out of service. All of that has had disastrous effects on defenceless civilians.

The Council has adopted binding resolutions that condemn the targeting of civilians and demand an end to their inhumane suffering, which is exacerbated by the absence of a ceasefire. All such violations are prohibited under the Geneva Conventions, whose seventy-fifth anniversary we are commemorating this

year. Unfortunately, the suffering is worsening, as the siege imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people continues and has led them to the point of starvation. They are being deprived of aid while Israel deliberately targets United Nations staff and other humanitarian staff who provide assistance to the Palestinian people.

Egypt continues its tireless efforts, alongside all parties, to take serious measures to stabilize the entire region and keep it from falling into an abyss of instability that would bring only more suffering to the region and the world. We reiterate our firm position against liquidating the Palestinian question and reject the forced displacement of the Palestinian people outside of their land through attempts to impose a fait accompli that makes life impossible in the Gaza Strip. Egypt once again reiterates the need to hold Israel, as the occupying Power, accountable for the current situation in Gaza, pursuant to international law and in the light of the devastation wrought by the ongoing war and aggression against Rafah, which makes it difficult to deliver aid.

Elsewhere, in the brotherly Sudan, Egypt is concerned about the violations against civilians and the continued crisis, as well as its serious consequences for the protection of civilians, who are being subjected to starvation, displacement and suffering as a result of armed confrontations. Egypt reiterates its call for an immediate ceasefire, respect for international humanitarian law, the delivery of humanitarian aid, respect for the Sudan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the preservation of State institutions and an end to foreign intervention in the Sudan's internal affairs, leading to a comprehensive settlement led and owned by the Sudanese people. Egypt remains committed to engaging with all stakeholders to that end.

In conclusion, Egypt stresses that the proliferation of armed conflicts reflects the need to advance sincere international efforts to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and accountability for violations such as starvation, intimidation and obstruction of humanitarian assistance. We must work to prevent conflicts and address their root causes.

In 2016, during its membership in the Security Council, Egypt — alongside Japan, Spain, New Zealand and Uruguay — contributed to the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), which reiterates the need to protect medical staff and workers in medical facilities during armed conflict, pursuant to international law,

and we remain committed to supporting all efforts towards achieving peace, stability and respect for international humanitarian law.

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

**Mrs. Güven (Türkiye):** We thank Mozambique for organizing this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also wish to thank the briefers for sharing their valuable insights.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a key aspect of international peace and security. As we observe the twenty-fifth anniversary of the landmark Security Council resolution that established a framework for international action on the protection of civilians — resolution 1265 (1999) — we reflect on the pressing challenges that persist. The legal framework for the protection of civilians is largely in place, yet civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts. Today we are witnessing ongoing conflicts in regions, including Gaza, Ukraine, the Sudan, Myanmar, Haiti and elsewhere. The imperative to uphold international humanitarian law remains as urgent as ever.

The Security Council has a significant responsibility to ensure the survival, security and dignity of civilians in conflict. We express our deep concern about the erosion of respect for international humanitarian law and the deliberate targeting of civilians, aid workers and civilian infrastructure and the obstruction of humanitarian assistance.

Over the past seven months, civilians in Gaza have endured indiscriminate attacks. Gaza's population has been forcibly displaced and deliberately deprived of the essentials of life. Civilians, the majority of whom are women and children, are not only facing extreme levels of violence but also catastrophic levels of hunger. The consequences of the abandonment of international humanitarian law will bring only more instability, more conflict and more suffering.

The international community demands an immediate ceasefire. The international community demands the protection of civilians and the civilian infrastructure they depend on, as international law requires. The international community also demands unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

In Syria, civilians continue to suffer from the protracted crisis. From the onset of the conflict,

Türkiye has consistently prioritized the safeguarding of the civilian population. We have displayed unwavering resolve in providing shelter to millions of Syrians fleeing the country. More than 4 million people living in north-west Syria are in acute need of humanitarian assistance and depend on the aid channelled through Türkiye. We continue to support United Nations cross-border humanitarian aid operations.

The conflict in the Sudan has entered its second year, and the clashes are continuing with devastating effects for the civilians. Half of the Sudanese population is in dire need of humanitarian aid. The establishment of safe humanitarian corridors in the Sudan remains a pressing priority.

In its third year, there is still no end in sight for the war in Ukraine. The humanitarian suffering is increasing. That is why global calls for a negotiated solution are on the rise. Since its outset, Türkiye has been advocating a negotiated solution to the conflict. The Black Sea Initiative was a good example of what the sides could have achieved if diplomacy had been given a chance.

Protecting civilians from violent attacks and the wrongdoing of terrorist organizations, including the recruitment and the use of children in armed conflicts, must also be a priority.

The international community must fight terrorism in all its forms and manifestations without any distinction. Diplomacy must also be part and parcel of our efforts for the protection of civilians. Long-term strategies to address the root causes of conflict and the development of mediation strategies are crucial for the prevention of armed conflict, thereby protecting civilians.

It was with that understanding that Türkiye launched the Mediation for Peace initiative with Finland here at the United Nations.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians is the crux of international peace and security. It is a legal and moral obligation. The international community expects the Security Council to fulfil its primary responsibility by taking decisive and timely action against threats that endanger civilians and undermine global peace and security. That reality also underscores the need for comprehensive reform of the Security Council to better address future conflicts and protect civilians effectively.



Türkiye will continue its efforts towards the protection of civilians and achieving a just, lasting and peaceful solution to conflicts.

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

**Mr. Hmoud (Jordan)** (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like, at the outset, to thank you, Mr. President, and your country's delegation, which is presiding over the Security Council during this month, for convening this meeting and allocating time to discuss the protection of civilians in armed conflict, especially as this year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

Despite the major efforts undertaken and investments made to strengthen the protection of civilians in conflict and instead of celebrating the progress made in that regard, we must face the harsh reality of the shocking toll that armed conflict is taking on civilians. The year 2024 has seen a steady erosion of the compliance with international laws and standards, in particular international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The gap between legal commitments and effective practice continues to widen, leaving civilians in conflict zones vulnerable to the devastating consequences of war.

The disproportionately high impact of armed conflicts on women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and other marginalized groups has become the norm rather than the exception. Civilians continue to suffer the tragic consequences of those conflicts, including in areas with United Nations peace operations or missions.

As conflicts increase in urban areas, the harm to civilians and damage to infrastructure is increasing drastically. Warring parties are causing harm to civilians, using famine and sexual violence as weapons of war, and destroying vital civilian infrastructure, livelihoods and education.

I would like to point out that it is our collective obligation not to justify any violations of international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Over the past quarter century, we have witnessed attempts to reinterpret the rules of international humanitarian law or to ambiguously

interpret the concepts of international protection in order to circumvent the rules of international humanitarian law and weaken the protection of civilians. There have been calls to modify the rules of international humanitarian law and claims that the Geneva Conventions and The Hague regulations are outdated. Those are attempts to give aggressors the green light to commit violations against civilians while ensuring their impunity. We must reject those attempts. The logic of might is right will bring us back to the law of the jungle. In that regard, we commend the International Committee of the Red Cross for all its efforts to uphold international humanitarian law and counter attempts to weaken and marginalize it.

While discussing the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, I must highlight the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip which has been ongoing for more than seven months. The barbaric war being perpetrated by the Israeli occupation army against Palestinian civilians in Gaza constitutes a flagrant violation of the most basic human rights and the international treaties and conventions on which our Organization was founded.

The number of martyred women and children in Gaza has exceeded the number of victims in all other wars and conflicts in the world during the past year combined. The international community and the Security Council have been unable to impose a permanent ceasefire, provide protection to unarmed civilians or ensure the entry of basic humanitarian aid in a sustainable way to all parts of Gaza.

It is regrettable that some are still trying to justify Israel's flagrant violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention and its international obligations related to the protection of Palestinian civilians. Mass killings, forced displacement, genocide and the destruction of vital infrastructure in Gaza will remain etched in human memory. Israel and its officials will bear the legal and moral consequences of that.

The world has seen major changes over the past few years. Armed conflicts have evolved and become more complex. At the same time, emerging threats such as new technologies, artificial intelligence, disinformation wars and climate change have reshaped the nature and magnitude of the risks faced by civilians in conflict zones. It is now more urgent than ever to ensure the protection of civilians and to assume responsibility for

preventing and ending armed conflicts and holding violators accountable.

It is not enough for States to fulfil their legal obligations. They also need to use their influence to ensure that all parties to a conflict comply with international norms and standards. That includes protecting civilians, humanitarian workers, rescue workers, paramedics, journalists and activists from any harm.

Major countries that export arms play a decisive role in enhancing compliance with international standards by stopping the provision of arms and ammunition to places where there is a significant risk of violating international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2024/385) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for its main recommendations. Jordan urges members of the Security Council and all States Members of the United Nations to use this opportunity to stress the need to ensure the effective implementation of international laws, standards and relevant Security Council resolutions. We also stress the shared responsibility for addressing crises and protecting civilians.

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

**Mrs. Narváez Ojeda (Chile)** (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the opportunity to participate in today's open debate. We take note of the briefings and statements heard today. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mozambique for its leadership of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

My delegation aligns itself fully with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

Resolution 1265 (1999) has played an important part in addressing the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Since its adoption, the Council has adopted numerous resolutions emphasizing the need to protect civilians and respect human rights, international law and international humanitarian law, as well as to promote the rule of law and accountability.

We would also highlight the adoption of resolution 2664 (2022) of December 2022, which seeks to prevent the sanctions of this Organization

from harming civilian populations and obstructing humanitarian action. We urge all States to implement that resolution, as even sanctions regimes must allow for humanitarian exemptions.

Despite the adoption of that resolution, we concur with the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385) in that, in some contexts, humanitarian actors still face financial and logistical obstacles and operational delays due to unilateral and United Nations sanctions and excessively broad counter-terrorism measures.

We reject attacks on critical civilian infrastructure, life-saving goods and essential services, including schools, hospitals, dams, food storage and supply chain systems and power generation installations, and we reject sexual violence. In that regard, more countries must submit to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, a specialized tribunal that can prosecute war crimes — that is what such attacks and acts of violence are.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Protocols Additional are of course the cornerstone of respect for commitments to protect the civilian population. We regret that they are not being respected. In that regard, States Members of the United Nations must implement provisions for the protection of civilians in their national legislation and ensure that they are implemented in armed conflict. States cannot be indifferent to the obligation to protect the integrity, well-being and dignity of civilians, and in particular those of vulnerable and defenceless groups. We recall that, in any conflict, the elderly and persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected, as many are unable to leave the area of hostilities by their own means and are left more exposed to death and disease and have limited access to food, water, medicine and shelter.

We would like to underline that, according to the report under discussion, in 2023 the United Nations recorded no fewer than 33,443 civilian deaths in armed conflicts, 72 per cent more than in 2022. In turn, that year's figure was 53 per cent higher than in 2021. Last year, the proportion of women and children killed in armed conflict also increased. In 2023, 4 out of 10 civilians killed were women, and 3 out of 10 civilians killed were children. We are alarmed by the fact that 7 out of 10 deaths recorded occurred in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel, making that conflict

the deadliest for civilians in 2023. We must not forget the many other conflicts around the world today.

There is no doubt that the protection of civilians lies at the heart of peacekeeping operations. We emphasize that peacekeepers must be adequately trained to fulfil their mandates. Troops must constantly confront armed non-State actors who try to destabilize various Governments and attack civilians and are always closely linked to arms smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal activities.

We value initiatives that highlight the protection of civilians in armed conflict, such as the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, signed by more than 80 countries in November 2022 in Dublin, and the adoption of the resolution on lethal autonomous weapons systems last year in the General Assembly (General Assembly resolution 78/241).

We urgently call for an end to all conflicts and for a redoubling of the good offices of Member States to reach peaceful solutions, because violence is never solved with more violence. A concrete way to reduce civilian deaths and injuries in armed conflicts is to reduce military spending. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in 2023, global military spending stood at \$2.443 trillion, an increase of 6.8 per cent over 2022, the steepest increase since 2009.

Finally, we take note of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and advocate for their implementation.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.*