



Security Council

Eightieth year

9921

st meeting

Thursday, 22 May 2025, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Gerapetritis	(Greece)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Sun Lei
	Denmark	Ms. Lassen
	France	Mr. Bonnafont
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Pakistan	Mr. Ahmad
	Panama	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Cho
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Totangi
	Slovenia	Ms. Gabrič
	Somalia	Mr. Osman
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Ms. Shea

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2025/271)

Letter dated 7 May 2025 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2025/301)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2025/271)

Letter dated 7 May 2025 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2025/301)

The President: I would like to warmly welcome the Ministers and other high-level representatives here in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

Before each member is a list of speakers who have requested to participate in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, as well as the previous practice of the Council in this regard. We propose that they be invited to participate in this meeting.

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/2025/301, which contains the text of a letter dated 7 May 2025 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. Fletcher: I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and for prioritizing discussion of this urgent and vital issue.

In short, the scaffolding built last century to protect us from inhumanity is crumbling. Those who will die as a result need us to act.

Last year the United Nations recorded more than 36,000 civilian deaths in 14 armed conflicts. The real number, I fear, is much higher. In several contexts, repeated attacks harming civilian infrastructure caused disruptions to electricity, water sanitation, education and livelihoods, depriving millions of the essentials to survive. The number of people forcibly displaced reached new highs of more than 122 million — most displaced within their countries. Reports of enforced disappearance, torture, inhumane treatment and other trauma were widespread. Sexual violence was rampant. The United Nations verified some 4,500 cases last year; 93 per cent of victims were women and girls. Conflict-driven hunger reached alarming levels.

Healthcare was not spared. The World Health Organization documented incidents of harm to patients, transport and medical supplies, while millions of sick and injured people were deprived of medical care. Violence, bureaucratic and administrative measures and other factors continued to hinder humanitarian access. Humanitarian aid was even used as a bargaining chip to pressure parties and populations.

The past year was also the deadliest year on record for humanitarians. More than 360 aid workers were killed, including at least 200 in Gaza and at least 54 in the Sudan — mostly national staff. Meanwhile, false narratives and disinformation

undermined humanitarian operations and eroded trust in humanitarian actors, endangering the lives of our colleagues and the people they serve.

Those trying to report on the plight of civilians were also harmed. According to UNESCO, 53 journalists were killed in armed conflict last year, a sharp increase from previous years. The most striking example is in Gaza, which international journalists are still prevented from entering, and where local journalists have been killed in alarming numbers.

New technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), have begun transforming warfare. AI has reportedly been deployed to select military targets, raising grave concerns about compliance with international law and the erosion of human oversight. Information technologies are also being used in ways that increase dangers for civilians, whether by disrupting or damaging essential infrastructure and services, deleting vital data or drawing civilians to play a part in armed conflict.

We are therefore witnessing an unravelling of the protection of civilians and of respect for international humanitarian law. That is despite the lessons of history and our clear legal commitments. Some parties to conflict have committed flagrant violations of the rules of war. Some have justified immense civilian harm through permissive interpretations of the law — loosely defining who is a lawful target, what constitutes a military objective or what level of civilian harm is proportional. The first-ever withdrawal from a humanitarian disarmament treaty — and more announced, I am afraid, since — have propagated the dangerous and outdated idea that exceptional threats and military necessity can outweigh international humanitarian law.

Some States consider the law selectively, depending on the parties concerned or the interests at stake. All this undermines the very purpose of the rules of war: to limit human suffering in armed conflict. All this jeopardizes the protection architecture that took decades to build.

There is another path, though, provided the Council and Member States take action to salvage what they have built.

First, we must ensure compliance. All parties must respect international humanitarian law, and all States have a duty to ensure respect for it. Political dialogue, the public condemnation of violations, the training of armed forces and responsible arms transfers are tangible actions that Member States must take to that end. The International Court of Justice has reminded all States of their international obligations relating to the transfer of arms to parties to an armed conflict, in order to avoid the risk that such arms might be used to violate the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The measures required to protect civilians are long-standing and time-tested. They require strict adherence to international law and the adoption of good-faith policies and practices to enhance protection.

Secondly, we must fight impunity. In 2024, we saw important steps forward. In Uganda, a former commander of the Lord's Resistance Army was convicted of 44 charges, including murder and rape. In Liberia, the President established a war crimes court to address atrocities from the civil wars. National courts in France, Germany, Portugal and elsewhere prosecuted individuals for war crimes committed abroad. The International Criminal Court issued new arrest warrants. Those efforts must be supported. Justice must not be selective; it must remain independent and not be politicized. Attacks on the integrity of courts are unacceptable.

Thirdly, we must acknowledge that not all civilian harm comes from violations of the law. Even when parties comply, the scale of civilian harm can be devastating. That is why the Secretary-General has called for a more comprehensive and

people-centred approach to the protection of civilians. That entails adopting strong policy and operational measures to protect civilians and a deeper understanding of patterns of life and harm. It also means considering protection through civilians' perspectives and rights.

Last week, in the Security Council (see S/PV.9914), I asked what action we will tell future generations we took to stop twenty-first century atrocities. But the question does not apply to Gaza alone. It applies to so many conflicts where civilians are trapped and terrorized. The Council and every Member State must therefore summon greater political will and courage to turn the tide.

Let us be remembered not for the warnings we gave but for the action we took.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women.

Ms. Bahous: My thanks go to the Greek presidency for its invitation to brief the Security Council today on the protection of civilians, at a moment when the situation of women and girls is rapidly deteriorating across conflicts.

This year marks 25 years since resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, recognizing that peace is inextricably linked to gender equality. It is also the thirtieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action — a blueprint for the realization of women's rights everywhere. However, today more than 612 million women and girls are living in conflict zones. That is not just a number — it should be a call to action for all of us.

In war, women and girls are not just caught up in the crossfire — they, their bodies, their health, their choices and their voices are actively targeted. Conflict-related sexual violence is a protection crisis that rightfully warrants specific attention. I know that the Council will continue to consider this issue with the sustained focus it demands.

Today I will focus on forms of gender-based violence that are too often overlooked: reproductive violence, violence using explosive weapons, mental trauma and targeted attacks on women in public life — threats increasingly enabled by digital technologies.

Across too many conflicts, women's bodies become battlegrounds, through sexual violence and the deliberate denial of reproductive rights and health services. Sixty-one per cent of all maternal deaths occur in just 35 conflict-affected countries. In the past year, we have seen bombed maternity wards, blockaded medical supplies and massive funding cuts. In Afghanistan, where 90 per cent of women lack access to essential healthcare services, a woman dies from preventable pregnancy-related complications every two hours. One third already deliver without medical assistance. With bans on female workers and shrinking access to care, maternal deaths are projected to rise by 50 per cent by 2026. In Gaza, more than 28,000 women and girls have been killed since October 2023 — an average of one woman and one girl killed every hour. Tens of thousands have given birth under bombardment and siege, without anaesthetics, post-partum care or clean water, while malnourished, displaced and traumatized. Those are not natural consequences of war. They constitute a pattern of reproductive violence. Today I call for reproductive violence to be treated as a distinct category of harm and for perpetrators to be held accountable. The destruction of reproductive health infrastructure represents a blatant violation of international law, and it is costing women their lives.

Too often, women are seen as indirect victims, but they are the direct targets of bombs and missiles. When markets, maternity wards, girls' schools and homes are hit, women and girls die. It is no accident. Such attacks are growing more frequent,

and they show exactly how wars are being waged. In Myanmar, air strikes increased after the devastating earthquake in March, despite a declared ceasefire. For women and girls, that meant renewed displacement, perilous journeys, a loss of access to healthcare and heightened risks of trafficking and exploitation.

Violence leaves scars, not only on the body but on the mind. Trauma compounds over time, especially when layered with loss, displacement and constant fear. Mental health is not a luxury — it is life-saving. In Gaza, 75 per cent of women suffer from depression. Girls say that they wish they were dead. In Afghanistan, women describe living in prisons. In Ukraine, domestic violence is rising, and more than half of displaced women report depression. Those are not isolated statistics — they signal profound suffering. Protection must include psychological support. Without it, women cannot recover, rebuild or lead.

Women who speak out — journalists, activists, politicians — face bullets, bombs, threats and smear campaigns. Even when not physically attacked, they are driven out by digital violence — deepfakes, harassment and disinformation. Online spaces have also become battlegrounds. In Ukraine, 81 per cent of women journalists report facing online abuse. In Yemen, manipulated images and online attacks have pushed many women out of journalism. That is deliberate and must be addressed as a civilian protection issue.

Since adopting 10 resolutions on women and peace and security, the Council has made women's full, equal and meaningful participation one of its most repeated commitments. But how can women participate if it puts their lives at risk? Protection and participation are inseparable. Without safety, women cannot organize, speak or lead, and without their leadership, peace efforts fail and accountability breaks down.

I come to the Council with three asks.

First, the Council must do more to support justice and accountability for women and girls. These atrocities continue in part because they are committed with impunity. UN-Women works relentlessly to seek justice for crimes against women and girls in war and ensure that they are also recorded for posterity. For more than 15 years, we have deployed gender experts to every United Nations commission of inquiry and fact-finding mission, but documentation alone is not enough. With a few welcome exceptions, perpetrators face no consequences. Sanctions regimes remain underutilized. They must cover sexual violence across and alongside the full range of violations against women and girls.

Secondly, women's organizations on the front lines must be supported. Despite everything, women resist with courage, leadership and care. In the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere, they document abuses and shelter the displaced. In Colombia, they shape transitional justice. In Haiti, they demand protection from gang violence and rape. Yet those organizations are under siege. Funding cuts mean that half may shut down within six months. Ninety per cent are already at breaking point. Continued funding cuts will cost us the very women driving peace and recovery in the world's most fragile contexts. I ask members to support them in their collective decisions, bilateral funding and dialogues with Governments closing civic space. I urge members to use their influence, and they can count on UN-Women to continue to stand with those women and women's organizations. In 2024, we channelled \$110 million to women's organizations, much of it in fragile and crisis-affected settings. Upholding 25 years of commitments on women and peace and security depends on the strength of the women's movement. That is the fight UN-Women is committed to advancing. And it is what we must collectively commit to and protect across discussions on reform, including on the UN80 Initiative. The women and peace and security agenda must remain steadfast and unshaken.

Thirdly, we must recognize women's empowerment as a protection strategy. Protection and participation go hand in hand. The most effective shield we can offer women and girls is their own power, their own voice and their own leadership. When women lead, they protect not only themselves but their families and communities and their countries. When they participate in politics, in security forces and in peace processes, the impact is transformative.

There is no pathway to peace that does not begin with the protection of women and girls, no clearer obligation in international humanitarian law, no greater responsibility for the United Nations and no more pressing concern for the Security Council.

The President: I thank Ms. Bahous for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Ms. Spoljaric Egger: I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to brief the Security Council. I will not repeat the horrors being inflicted on civilians because of widespread violations of international humanitarian law. The Council is briefed week after week about civilians being maimed and murdered, about civilians being detained, tortured, raped, starved and forcibly displaced. And yet, we have to ask ourselves: where is the political courage to stop the killing?

Today we face not only a crisis of compliance with the rules of war, but of our collective conscience. The precedent being set on battlefields today will haunt us for a long time.

There are no excuses for double standards. Every State has a stake in this. Last September when I last briefed this Council (see S/PV.9732), I called on Council members to turn rhetorical support for international humanitarian law into action. Specifically, I urged them to call their allies when they violate the rules of war and demand that they stop. The moment to pick up the phone is now.

No one wants to live in a world where the rules of war apply only to one's enemies and not to oneself or one's allies. Civilians will suffer less when all sides commit to the basic principles of humanity in war. Ignoring those rules is a race to the moral bottom — a fast track to chaos and irreversible despair. That is exactly how the contagion of conflict spreads. The impacts of "total victory" or "because we can" reverberate far beyond war zones. Unrestrained violence breeds even bigger security threats that can strike when and where we least expect.

Council members' States may not be at war today. Their families may be far from the front lines. But tides turn. New conflicts erupt. And if members do not defend the rules of war today, they are accepting a world in which wars are fought with increasing barbarity and disregard for our shared humanity.

Today the International Committee of the Red Cross counts approximately 130 armed conflicts across the world — more than it recorded a year ago, and more than six times what it saw 25 years ago. Many of those conflicts are deeply protracted. In many parts of the world, armed forces or non-State armed groups represent the only viable source of income. That does not support hope for stability, let alone sustainable economic growth.

And most importantly: the world of today is more interconnected than ever. In today's conflicts, one does not have to pull the trigger to be complicit in the consequences.

The Geneva Conventions were born out of the smouldering ruins of war — out of genocide, out of mass suffering — to sear into public consciousness that wars must have limits. The horror inflicted on civilians in the Second World War rallied the world to expand international humanitarian law to provide protections to civilians in

times of armed conflict. That led to the creation and adoption of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which provides clear, unambiguous protections for civilians in times of armed conflict to which all States are bound.

International humanitarian law prohibits torture, sexual violence and hostage-taking. It requires hospitals, homes and schools to be spared from hostilities. It demands that all those who are captured and detained in conflict be treated humanely. It specifies that the wounded and sick must be cared for and that civilians have a right to receive humanitarian aid.

International humanitarian law also places special emphasis on the vulnerabilities of civilians living in occupied territories: they must have access to food, water and medical care. International humanitarian law forbids the forcible transfer or deportation from occupied territories. It specifies that if conditions are made unbearable — through indiscriminate military operations or the denial of food, water, medical care or safety — any movement of civilians would still be considered involuntary.

Protecting civilians means upholding those protections. The survival of those life-saving rules cannot be taken for granted. They must be defended, and they must be prioritized.

I am calling on the Security Council to prevent any permissive signals that international humanitarian law can be ignored, that life-saving aid can be denied and that principled humanitarian action can be replaced. That sets a dangerous precedent, especially when conflict is the greatest driver of the very needs that are being ignored as I speak.

The Security Council was created to promote international peace and security. Members' responsibility to find ways to de-escalate, to reconcile and to build a more stable and prosperous world will be far harder if we allow the rules to be trampled with impunity.

The way wars are fought influences how they end. The path to peace starts in a prison cell. It starts with treating prisoners with the very same dignity that one would demand for oneself. Peace starts with treating the wounded, reconnecting separated families, ensuring the provision of life-saving aid and sparing civilians and civilian infrastructure from harm.

There is a growing movement coming together to stand behind universal and life-saving rules. Last September, six States took a stand and launched, with the ICRC, a global initiative to galvanize political support for international humanitarian law. Today 75 States have joined, and we call on all States to do so.

It is in the darkest moments that our commitment to protecting civilians is most tested and needed. But it is possible to protect civilians in war.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Janti Soeripto, President and Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children.

Ms. Soeripto: The treatment of children in conflict is an expression and a test of our collective humanity. And by most metrics, we seem to be failing that test.

More than 470 million children — more than one in six — now live in areas affected by conflict. Grave violations against children are being committed at an unprecedented scale and with impunity. Roughly half of the civilian population we seek to protect and assist are children. Children are not small adults. Children are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of war, with a far lower threshold for harm compared to adults. As our founder, Eglantyne Jebb, once stated, children suffer

first and suffer most. What may be a disruption for adults can be life-altering or life-ending for a child.

The denial of education not only halts learning but exposes children to heightened risks of exploitation, trafficking, and recruitment. Janvier, a child from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who briefed the Council in 2024 (see S/PV.9669), spoke of children being abducted and raped while crossing long distances to get to school, after their own school had been attacked.

Children have a higher mortality rate, whether from starvation, thirst, or from preventable diseases that become fatal as malnutrition weakens their bodies. Fadumo, a colleague of mine working in Somalia, describes what it is like when children arrive with acute malnutrition:

“The child has reached the last stage of human survival. It affects the children physically and the body of the child shrinks. The skin becomes attached to the bone, then the child becomes a skeleton and the skin becomes swollen. There are blisters on the skin, visible lightening of the hair colour, oral thrush; the child feels weaker, with eye problems and a short temper, and cries the whole day, until it stops doing even that”.

Let us be clear: starvation is a slow and violent death.

Children are seven times more likely to die from blast injuries than adults. The blast is more likely to penetrate their small bodies, and they have less blood to lose before they bleed out.

Even when, or if, conflict ends, children’s specific vulnerabilities do not. They are 50 per cent more likely to suffer blast injuries, post-conflict, from explosive remnants of war.

It seems now more than ever that we are at a moment in which many competing visions of the future are battling for supremacy. The laws and norms that humankind has constructed to protect civilians, in particular children, from harm during situations of armed conflict are being systematically challenged, undermined and attacked. That is not an erosion but an assault on the values of humankind.

For over 100 years, Save the Children has understood that addressing the symptoms of a crisis can only get us so far. We must tackle its causes too.

Often, when we engage Member States on the great humanitarian and children’s rights challenges of the day, we are asked for technical solutions to what are inherently political problems. Yes, we need support to get food, medicine and schooling to children trapped in conflict. But we also need the members of the General Assembly and the Security Council to do their job. They have obligations, moral and legal, to take action to protect civilians and find political solutions that prevent these atrocities.

When civilians are denied their right to humanitarian assistance, or a humanitarian worker is murdered, or a school bombed, that action stems from a political choice to disregard the laws of war. That choice is based on a calculation that we, the international community, will not enforce the universal obligations of international humanitarian law.

Recently, a colleague of ours was talking to a malnourished mother of two twin boys in Raqqa, Syria. After 14 years of war, she is consumed by a single, desperate goal — finding food for another day. When she heard the nutrition centre supporting her children might close, she broke down, her tears soaking into the parched ground. For her, survival is not theoretical — it is a daily battle, and hope is a luxury she can no longer afford.

A child starving in Syria or Gaza suffers the same pain as the child in Zamzam camp in the Sudan. A child in Ukraine feels the same fear from bombing as a child in Myanmar.

Each grave violation against a child represents a failure of the international system.

The children and armed conflict mandate is among the Security Council's most successful, with 38 armed actors signing action plans to protect children better, and more than 200,000 children released from armed actors. It must be maintained as a stand-alone function of the United Nations system. The monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict is the Council's eyes and ears, protecting children on the ground — it needs funding and political support. We urge the Security Council to appoint a Chair of the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict. The Group's work is essential. It is one of the busiest subsidiary bodies of the Council and plays a vital role in the protection of children in conflict. The Council must appoint a Chair and begin working.

In turn, we, children's rights actors, need to do more to publicize the resolutions the Council adopts, and the many child-protection wins that stem from them.

It is incumbent upon us to imagine a new, better future. There can be no peace without justice, and no protection without accountability. The Council must consistently demand credible, independent investigations into crimes and violations against civilians, in particular children; support the establishment of and referrals to accountability mechanisms; and ensure full access and support for child survivors.

The inflection point we are living through is an opportunity for humanitarian actors to reorganize ourselves to be more effective and accountable in how we deliver to, for and with civilians in conflict zones. Yes, donors should increase the amount of support they are providing, but it is also the time for new donors to step forward and truly champion grand bargain commitments. It is an opportunity for Member States to embrace the laws and tools we have at our disposal already and use them.

Council members must fulfil their commitments — legal and moral — to protect civilians in conflict. They must make tough political choices, call out perpetrators of harm, and use the institutions we do have, to effect, and reform them where they are broken. They must ratify and implement the newer instruments of international law that have emerged, such as the Safe Schools Declaration.

There is no shortage of energy, ideas and initiatives to improve children's futures; they only need to be implemented. Protection of children is the basis of justice today, and the foundation for peace and security tomorrow. We urge the Council to act.

The President: I thank Ms. Soeripto for her briefing.

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

First of all, I thank Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UN-Women; Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Janti Soeripto, President and Chief Executive Officer of the non-governmental organization Save the Children US, for their insightful briefings.

Today we encounter a multitude of severe crises — aggression, forced displacement, climate change, food insecurity, public health challenges and the malicious use of digital technology. Those challenges form the backdrop to the devastating impact of armed conflict on civilians around the world, and I note what Ms. Spoljaric mentioned about the surge in armed conflicts — today there are 130 active conflicts.

Almost 2,500 years ago, the Athenian historian Thucydides wrote that war is a violent teacher. Those words still resonate. Eighty years after the end of the Second World War, we find ourselves in one of the most critical periods in modern history. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has reached catastrophic proportions, as the blockade on aid into Gaza has been in place for more than two months now. With more than 50,000 Palestinians dead, the level of human suffering is unprecedented, and the need for the respect for international humanitarian law, and more specifically for the four Geneva Conventions, remains ever crucial. Compliance is imperative, as Under-Secretary-General Fletcher just mentioned.

In Europe, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia is having an indelible effect on civilians. Attacks with heavy civilian casualties have intensified significantly since the beginning of this year. Worldwide, there are conditions that are degrading human dignity, with displaced populations and people on the verge of poverty, as is the case in the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and Haiti, to name but a few.

According to the most recent annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/271), 2024 bore witness to an appalling increase in the numbers of humanitarian personnel and journalists killed. Missing persons increased by more than 16,000, while a staggering 52 million children stayed out of school in countries affected by armed conflict. We should consider that, behind those numbers, lie human lives and the rights of future generations.

The reality on the ground of more protracted and complex armed conflicts paints a grim picture of violence and destruction. That violence has the face and voice of children, of older people, of persons with disabilities and of women and girls — and I recall the dramatic briefing by Executive Director Bahous. It has the face and voice of humanitarian personnel, who offer much-needed life-saving solutions on the ground, and of journalists, who are trying to ensure accurate reporting on armed conflicts.

With regard to the protection of diplomatic personnel working under dire conditions, it is of paramount importance that the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations be respected by all parties. Attacks or threats of attack are unacceptable. Especially today, we are appalled by the news of the deadly shooting in Washington, D.C., which claimed the lives of two Embassy staff members, and by shots fired in the vicinity of foreign diplomats visiting Jenin, the West Bank. We condemn those heinous acts of violence and call on every side to hold those responsible fully accountable.

With those considerations in mind, allow me to begin by focusing on the single-most vulnerable group, which, I believe, we can all agree should be our highest priority in the area of protection, namely, children.

Children in armed conflicts are dying. We consider it a moral imperative to end and prevent any violence against them. I would like to commend the invaluable work by UNICEF, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as the Special Representative of Secretary-General on Violence against Children. Their unwavering commitment serves to reinforce the responsibility of the Organization to place children at the centre of peace and security efforts. As President Soeripto argued, children should not be treated as small adults. In their efforts to support their families and communities in armed conflicts, women, including caregivers, often experience physical, sexual and psychological violence.

The death toll among humanitarian workers in 2024 was the deadliest on record, with the vast majority losing their lives in Gaza. As the Secretary-General mentions in his report, disinformation campaigns and the spread of harmful information further eroded trust in humanitarian actors, reduced their operational effectiveness and placed humanitarian personnel at risk. Yet hope remains when we work together.

In the newly adopted Pact for the Future (General Assembly resolution 79/1), Member States were able to reaffirm their commitment to effectively addressing armed conflict, including by enabling humanitarian access, protecting humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel, ending impunity and exercising control over the international transfer of conventional arms. To that end, I would like to emphasize the following points.

Acting to ensure compliance by States and parties to conflict with the provisions of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and Security Council resolutions requires a holistic approach. It entails political will and decisive political action, deliberative mechanisms, sustained international cooperation, enhanced monitoring mechanisms and established coordination structures. Impunity encourages further aggression. It is therefore crucial to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law.

The unimpeded, regular and safe delivery of vital humanitarian aid, in full respect of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, is indeed critical. Delays compromise the rights of future generations. The synergy of the United Nations system, the international community and non-governmental organizations working through joint planning and collaboration at the field level can ensure a timely humanitarian response and enhance protection mechanisms.

It is our special responsibility and duty to ensure that humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel be able to fulfil their mandate in safety and security. We also stress the need for the full implementation of resolution 2474 (2019), regarding missing persons, and fully support the work of the United Nations, among other bodies, through the establishment of commissions on missing persons.

It is equally important to highlight the invaluable contribution and the essential leadership of women — including women journalists — in times of crisis and to protect them from gender-based violence. Journalists must fulfil their duties in safety and dignity. This year marks the tenth anniversary of resolution 2222 (2015), on the protection of journalists and associated media personnel in armed conflict, while next year resolution 1738 (2006,) on attacks against journalists in armed conflict, co-penned by France and Greece, turns 20. In modern armed conflicts, journalists usually become targets of hybrid warfare and face not only violence but also misinformation and hate speech campaigns that undermine their credibility. Such a practice is tantamount to reverse propaganda. Finding effective ways to counter harmful narratives and promoting reliable and accurate information is vital. In that regard, we attach great importance to the use of new technologies in a way that leverages their potential to gather and analyse information so as to anticipate and avoid civilian harm.

Allow me to conclude by returning to where I began. I would like to make a specific reference to children. The current situation in Gaza, that humanitarian catastrophe, brings us face to face with our responsibilities. Today, in the context of the Security Council, this most appropriate forum, we must make abundantly clear that war, violence and propaganda should never deprive a child of the right to grow up — to grow up healthy and hopeful. It is therefore clear that our collective duty is to defend children in every possible way.

While keeping that in mind, we ought to request the obvious in the institutional context of the Security Council, that is, the immediate, full and unhindered flow of humanitarian aid at scale into all parts of the Gaza Strip, including food, medicines and essential supplies, combined with a sustainable ceasefire and the immediate release of all hostages. For that reason, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, Greece will use the monthly meeting on the Middle East, to be held on 28 May at the latest, to focus on the urgent humanitarian situation in Gaza.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Ms. Gabrič (Slovenia): I thank Executive Director Bahous and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings. My sincere thanks also to Ms. Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Soeripto for their important messages.

The latest report (S/2025/271) of the Secretary-General once again presents a grim picture of the protection of civilians. With new record numbers of civilians affected by conflicts, the trends remain alarming, in particular in Gaza, the Sudan, Ukraine and Myanmar, to name a few places. Yet again, the world is shocked by the images of hunger emerging from Gaza. War brings immense suffering to all civilians. However, some of them are particularly vulnerable. We must emphasize the specific vulnerabilities of children, women and older persons. They continue to be particularly affected by armed conflicts. The youngest members of our society are particularly vulnerable and at the greatest risk of death or permanent damage to their mental or physical health. Everything must be done to protect them from the horrors of war. Only in that way will they one day be able to build a resilient society.

The toll of war on women is also particularly heavy. In addition to being the backbone of their families and communities, they are at even greater risk of being the targets of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and forced marriage. It is particularly heinous when such acts are systematic and used as methods of war. Today I also wish to put a special emphasis on older persons. Despite the globally ageing population, the severe and often overlooked impact of armed conflict on older persons warrants our urgent attention. We see merit in the Council examining the specific challenges faced by older persons in armed conflicts, including older women.

Contemporary rules of war came into existence more than 150 years ago. However, despite all the sad lessons throughout history and despite clear legal commitments and obligations, parties to conflict continue to violate those rules blatantly, openly and more frequently. Particularly disturbing is the fact that civilians are deliberately targeted in order to achieve political and military goals by causing as much civilian suffering and as many casualties as possible. How is that humane?

However, international humanitarian law goes beyond prohibiting the targeting of civilians. It includes the question of the provision of essential services for the civilian population. It prohibits parties from attacking or destroying critical civilian objects and infrastructure, as they are vital for human survival, including drinking water installations and supplies. Yet that continues to occur in conflicts around the globe, including in Ukraine, where civilian infrastructure is being deliberately targeted.

For Slovenia, one of the most pressing concerns in conflict settings is the protection of water and sanitation infrastructure. Damage to those systems — whether intentional or incidental — has devastating long-term and far-reaching consequences for civilian populations, including on food production. In Gaza, the Sudan and elsewhere, we are witnessing how the destruction of water infrastructure leads to alarming levels of thirst and dehydration, the spread of diseases, the disruption of healthcare services and ultimately preventable deaths. Slovenia will remain committed to the issue, including through the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts and as the focal point for hunger and conflict, together with Guyana, in the Security Council.

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome the “Global Initiative to galvanize political commitment to international humanitarian law” of the International

Committee of the Red Cross, which responds to persistent and widespread disregard for international humanitarian law.

The Secretary-General has called for a more comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians. We fully agree with his outline of practical terms. For Slovenia, that means persistently evoking human rights norms and standards. All States are responsible for ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Working towards the full protection of civilians is a collaborative endeavour. Our collective commitment must be transformed into concrete action. Civilians affected by armed conflicts depend on it.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): At the outset, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Greek presidency for convening this very important meeting. We extend our appreciation to Mr. Tom Fletcher, Ms. Sima Bahous, Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Janti Soeripto for their very valuable briefings.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict remains a core principle of international humanitarian law. Yet today we are witnessing an alarming rise in violations of international humanitarian law, with innocent civilians bearing the brunt of unlawful warfare. Sadly, in many contexts — in particular in Gaza — respect for international humanitarian law has been reduced to an empty slogan. Shielded by impunity, parties to conflict are disregarding their legal obligations with near-total abandon. The numbers speak for themselves: in 2024 alone, the United Nations recorded more than 36,000 civilian deaths in 14 armed conflicts, the majority of them in Gaza.

Protecting civilians, humanitarian and United Nations personnel, journalists and media professionals and enhancing accountability mechanisms are not abstract ideals — they are the pillars of our shared legal and moral responsibility as a Security Council. We must act decisively to uphold them.

In 2024, nowhere was the collapse of international humanitarian law more complete or deadlier than in Gaza.

First, in Gaza, civilian infrastructure has been systematically destroyed. By the end of last year, nearly 70 per cent of all structures in Gaza had been damaged or flattened. The electricity blackout persisted throughout the year.

Second, in Gaza, forced displacement has become normalized. Two million people — approximately 90 per cent of Gaza's population — have been uprooted, almost all of them displaced many times.

Third, in Gaza, starvation is being weaponized. Eighty-six per cent of the population faced critical levels of food insecurity.

Fourth, in Gaza, medical neutrality has been obliterated. More than 300 attacks on health facilities were recorded in Gaza. Twenty out of the 36 hospitals and 86 healthcare centres were rendered non-functional.

Fifth, in Gaza, education has been shattered. 12,000 school children and 500 teachers were killed. Eighty-eight per cent of school buildings were damaged. An entire generation of Palestinian children lost a full academic year in 2024.

Sixth, in Gaza, journalism is under fire. Twenty journalists were killed, and international media access has been and is still being denied, murdering not only lives, but also the truth.

Seventh, in Gaza, humanitarian workers have been turned into targets. The year 2024 was the deadliest year on record in the world, with over 200 of 360 humanitarian workers killed in Gaza alone.

That situation is unacceptable, and the Council can no longer remain silent and idle. We must assume our responsibilities and our mandate as members of the Council to maintain international peace and security.

We must act without delay.

Algeria, with the support of the Group of Arab States, intends to circulate a very concise draft text focused on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and on access for and the distribution of humanitarian aid throughout the entire Strip. We count on everyone's support and spirit of compromise in that important endeavour. We will use language that we hope can unite not only Council members, but humankind in its entirety.

Enough killing, enough suffering, for the Palestinian people.

The failure to protect civilians is not the result of a lack of norms, it is a failure of will. The rules exist. What is lacking is the political will and political courage to enforce them.

We must collectively reaffirm that international humanitarian law is not negotiable. It is the last shield for the innocent amid the horrors of war. We owe it to the victims to ensure that those rules are upheld. All victims deserve justice and deserve accountability. Respect for international humanitarian law must not be the exception, it must be the rule. There is no place for double-standards. No one is above the law.

Let us rise to that responsibility.

Mr. Sun Lei (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Your Excellency Foreign Minister Gerapetritis for presiding over today's open debate. I thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher, Executive Director Bahous, Ms. Spoljaric and Ms. Soeripto for their respective briefings.

Recent years have witnessed escalating tensions at the international level and frequent outbreaks of conflict and turmoil. The Secretary-General's report (S/2025/271) pointed out that there are more than 120 ongoing armed conflicts worldwide, resulting in 122.6 million people being forcibly displaced, and more than 280 million facing acute food insecurity. In the past year alone, more than 360 humanitarian workers and more than 870 medical personnel were killed in conflicts. Behind those numbers are countless civilians caught in the crossfire, teetering between life and death, and innumerable families torn apart and separated from their loved ones. The international community must heighten its sense of urgency and take more robust actions to protect civilians. I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, we must strive to eliminate armed conflicts. As long as conflicts persist, the fundamental safety of civilians will remain elusive. All parties to conflicts should commit to settling disputes through dialogue and negotiation, and work towards the early restoration of peace and security. States should uphold the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security; adhere to the principle of indivisible security; and jointly build a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture. As the organ that bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council should promote the cessation of hostilities and protect civilians from the scourge of war. In Gaza, innocent lives are lost every day. Achieving a ceasefire and saving lives is an urgent priority that brooks no delay. We urge Israel to immediately halt its military offensive and fully restore access for humanitarian aid. China attaches great importance to the issue of illicit trafficking and misuse of conventional weapons, especially small arms and light weapons, and calls on the international community to take the necessary measures to combat that scourge. The continued influx of

illegal weapons has fuelled rampant gang violence in Haiti. A certain country should strictly implement the Security Council's arms embargo on Haiti.

Secondly, international humanitarian law must be strictly observed. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must never be targeted in military operations, and the safety and security of United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers must be guaranteed. Humanitarian aid must not be politicized and essential supplies, such as food and medicine, must not be weaponized. Those fundamental principles of international humanitarian law are widely recognized, yet they have been repeatedly breached and violated in conflicts. Compliance with international humanitarian law is a binding obligation for all parties, not an optional choice. Any double standards or selective application will erode the foundation of the international rule of law and encourage even further violations. The right of women and children to life and health deserves special attention and priority protection. The misuse and potential weaponization of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence poses serious risks. Countries should adopt a prudent and responsible approach in the military development and use of artificial intelligence and ensure human control over such weapon systems at all times.

China partnered with Brazil, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Africa and the International Committee of the Red Cross in launching a global initiative on international humanitarian law, with a view to galvanizing the international community's political commitment to international humanitarian law. Over 70 countries have joined this initiative. We call on more countries to follow suit and to work together to promote the observance and implementation of international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, it is imperative to build up the governance capacity of conflict-affected countries. States bear the primary responsibility for protecting civilians. When responding to conflicts, the international community should not only address immediate priorities, but also focus on long-term needs, providing targeted support to help the affected countries bolster their capacity to protect civilians. Poverty and underdevelopment are root causes of conflict and major obstacles to its resolution. The international community should increase development assistance to conflict-affected countries, teaching them how to fish, as it were. That includes supporting economic development, promoting employment, eradicating poverty and improving livelihoods, especially breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, in order to gradually eliminate breeding grounds for conflict and violence. United Nations peacekeeping operations should incorporate capacity-building for host countries into their transition strategies at an early date and create conditions for the gradual withdrawal of peacekeepers.

Fourthly, international humanitarian assistance must be scaled up. The United Nations and other humanitarian organizations have brought a ray of hope to civilians suffering from hunger, disease and displacement. However, since the beginning of this year, humanitarian operations have been significantly scaled back, not because situations have improved or needs have diminished, but due to severe funding cuts. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is currently facing a \$60 billion funding gap, and agencies such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF are also experiencing serious financial shortfalls. As the Secretary-General has pointed out, funding cuts will only aggravate the suffering of ordinary people who rely on aid. We call on the international community, especially traditional donors, to increase their support and to ensure that the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies have sufficient funding to carry out aid operations.

China attaches great importance to the issue of the protection of civilians and has consistently promoted the political settlement of hotspot issues, actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations and worked within the framework of

South-South cooperation in order to help relevant developing countries enhance their governance capacity. China remains committed to working with the international community to free the world from conflict at an early date and achieve peace and stability for all.

Mr. Bonnafont (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Minister Gerapetritis, for convening this open debate during your presidency of the Security Council, the importance of which everyone recognizes. I would also like to thank Mr. Fletcher, Ms. Spoljaric Egger, Ms. Bahous and Ms. Soeripto for their briefings.

From their briefings, as well as from the Secretary-General's latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2025/271), we can draw an inescapable and damning conclusion: in 2024, more than 36,000 civilians lost their lives in 14 major conflicts. The methods of war have become harsher, violations of international humanitarian law have multiplied, and civilians are increasingly being systematically targeted, starting with women and children. That reality cannot be silenced; France deplores it.

We reject silence and inaction in the face of the tragedy unfolding in Gaza. The population is facing severe food insecurity, and the Israeli Government refuses to provide essential and vital humanitarian aid to the civilian population. In the Sudan, armed conflict has forced 11 million civilians from their homes. Sudanese women and girls suffer systematic sexual violence. We refuse to be indifferent to the suffering of Ukrainian civilians, deliberate daily targets of Russian bombardment and aggression. We condemn the violence committed against all civilians, whether in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burma or so many other war-torn countries.

First, France calls on the Council to assume its responsibility, under the Charter, to enforce the application of international law in all dimensions that contribute to the protection of civilians, namely, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal justice.

Our individual and collective responsibility as States is to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law. States must subscribe to the main legal instruments in this field, notably the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions, and incorporate the provisions of same into their national legislation and military doctrines. States are duty-bound to respect international human rights law, which complements international humanitarian law. Protecting the fundamental rights of citizens in times of peace leads to respecting the rights of civilian populations in times of war.

The fight against impunity, based on the application of international criminal law, guarantees its effective enforcement. The Council must support existing mechanisms, first and foremost the International Criminal Court, and must encourage States to exercise their criminal jurisdiction, including within the framework of universal jurisdiction. France is playing its full part in that effort. French courts recently convicted three former Syrian officials of complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity. The trial of a former spokesman and alleged leader of the armed rebel group Jaysh Al-Islam is currently before the Paris Court of Assizes.

Secondly, this legal framework guides the very action of the Council, which is responsible for placing the protection of civilians at the heart of its decisions.

On the humanitarian front, it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that humanitarian actors can access populations and carry out their mission safely and unhindered, everywhere and at all times. On the security front, it is essential that peacekeeping operations have adequate resources to protect civilians and the necessary freedom of action to do so. The police component, in particular, must

fulfil its role. That requires clear and coherent mandates adapted to the realities of the situation.

France also recalls that journalists working in zones of armed conflict are civilians. As such, they must be respected and protected, in accordance with international humanitarian law and resolution 2222 (2015), adopted 10 years ago.

As encouraged by the Secretary-General, we are focusing on new technologies and their impact on the conduct of hostilities. That is an important aspect highlighted in the Secretary-General's latest report. The Council must encourage initiatives to control the use of such technologies, including as it relates to disinformation, which has a dramatic impact on civilians.

In keeping with its commitments, France is taking action. Together with five other States and the International Committee of the Red Cross, we have launched a political initiative to promote international humanitarian law, which many today have mentioned. On 29 April, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, along with President Spoljaric Egger, brought together the main stakeholders to advance this initiative.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians is not a declaration of intent: it guides every one of our decisions. It is the Council's responsibility to find political solutions that guarantee that protection. The ninety countries participating in this debate attest to the shared feeling of urgency. Our humanity, our collective responsibility and our credibility are at stake.

Ms. Lassen (Denmark): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this very important debate. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher, Executive Director Bahous, International Committee of the Red Cross President Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Soeripto, Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children US, for their clear and sobering briefings, which should truly be a wake-up call for us all.

In 2025, civilians in conflict find themselves at the intersection of unchecked impunity, fast-moving technologies and waning global attention. The proliferation of conflict, climate disaster, hunger and economic shocks has amplified violence, while cuts in funding have severely limited the humanitarian system's ability to respond at a time when it is most needed.

From Haiti to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and from Ukraine to Myanmar, long-standing impunity for violations of international law has eroded the humanitarian and protection system built with the founding of the United Nations, which was pointed out by several of our briefers here today.

Multilateral values are clearly under pressure. Disinformation recasts victims as perpetrators and perpetrators as victims. Meanwhile, cheap but powerful weapons lower the threshold for violence and are used to dampen dissent and protest worldwide. Put simply, impunity has pushed our system — the system that we collectively worked so hard to establish and nourish for the past 80 years — to the breaking point.

We see the direct consequences of that in Gaza. Nineteen months of devastation and now 11 weeks of a complete humanitarian blockade have pushed more than 2 million people into critical risk of famine. The humanitarian principles are also being forced out in order to make way for the privatization, deprivation and militarization of aid.

Denmark reiterates its call on Israel to allow for the full resumption of aid into Gaza immediately. Israel must enable the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to work in accordance with the humanitarian principles.

In the Sudan, a similar pattern is unfolding, in a war with devastating impacts on millions of civilians, including widespread acts of sexual and gender-based violence

against women and girls. Parties to the conflict dismiss verified famine warnings while arms, money and fighters continue to flow across borders. External sponsors profess innocence, even as civilians starve. Bureaucratic and administrative impediments slow and often stall any meaningful response. In Ukraine, civilians are not just caught in the crossfire, but have themselves become targets. So-called double-tap strikes deliberately target humanitarian and rescue services attempting to free survivors trapped under the rubble.

If we are to reverse course and stop our multilateral system from reaching the point of no return, then we must return to upholding international humanitarian law, engage in peacebuilding and ensure accountability. In that regard, allow me to make three points.

First, humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for inclusive and meaningful political settlement and peacebuilding efforts. If the Council does not work to address the root causes of war, millions of civilians will remain at risk. From peace operations to the Secretary-General's good offices, we have the tools required to mediate between and influence parties, ensuring far greater protections for civilians trapped in conflict all around the world. Collectively, we have the power to save lives, if the effort to do so is backed by the requisite political will.

Secondly, autonomous and artificial intelligence-enabled weapons require human oversight and human control in decision-making. Responsibility and accountability cannot be delegated to machines. We must ensure that the development and use of autonomous weapons is in full compliance with international humanitarian law, including the principle of distinction.

Thirdly, accountability mechanisms are for use, not merely for display. While States bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations from atrocities, the international community — and the Council — also have a collective responsibility to protect populations from such crimes. International law must be applied consistently, and those who target civilians, aid convoys, aid workers, health facilities or journalists must be held to account.

Persistent impunity is a driver of new atrocities. We must ensure that those who perpetrate grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other serious violations of the laws of armed conflict are held accountable. When national systems falter, international processes must step in, and vice versa. Only a predictable, enforced system of accountability will deter future crimes. If we fail on those fronts, our failure will give a green light to those who bomb hospitals, recruit children, perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence and weaponize hunger. And while our multilateral system may be down, it is certainly not out. A stronger, more cooperative future remains in our hands.

Mr. Cho (Republic of Korea): I thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher, President Spoljaric Egger, Executive Director Bahous and President Soeripto for their comprehensive briefings.

Over the past 25 years, the Security Council has adopted landmark resolutions regarding the protection of civilians, establishing and reinforcing the normative framework of international humanitarian law. Yet, despite that foundation, we continue to witness the widespread disregard thereof.

In 2024 alone, more than 36,000 civilian deaths were recorded across 14 armed conflicts. In Gaza, nearly 70 per cent of all structures, including 92 per cent of residential buildings, have been damaged or destroyed. In the Sudan, nearly one quarter of the entire population is internally displaced, making that displacement crisis the largest one ever recorded. Those grave figures compel us to identify more

effective means of protecting civilians amid today's gravest and most multifaceted challenges. Let me make the following three points in that regard.

First, the Council must take all necessary measures to reinforce the imperative of providing tailored protection for vulnerable groups, particularly women, children and persons with disabilities. While the Geneva Conventions and human rights treaties stipulate obligations to provide special protection to those groups, the reality tells a different story. For instance, women and children represented nearly 70 per cent of confirmed civilian deaths in Gaza since 7 October 2023. As noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2025/271), in Ukraine and many other conflict zones, attacks on schools have injured students and disrupted education, leaving 52 million children out of school. Likewise, marginalized populations also face disproportionate exposure to humanitarian deprivation. Member States must reaffirm their commitments and take concrete actions to ensure equitable access to humanitarian aid and protection for vulnerable groups. The Council should also ensure that peacekeeping operations mandated to protect civilians, including women and children, are adequately resourced and supported to effectively implement their mandates.

Secondly, we must reinforce robust protections for humanitarian workers and journalists, who perform critical roles in conflict zones by providing life-saving aid and bearing witness to violations. Notwithstanding resolutions 1738 (2006) and 2730 (2024), targeted attacks against humanitarian and media personnel persist. As noted in the report, more than 360 humanitarian workers were killed in 2024 across 20 countries, and 53 journalist killings recorded by UNESCO occurred in countries affected by armed conflict. More than 200 aid workers and 20 journalists were killed in Gaza alone — the highest such tolls recorded in any conflict in decades. In addition, the arbitrary and prolonged detention of humanitarian and United Nations personnel by the Houthis further undermines relief operations and exacerbates civilian suffering. Such attacks erode trust, restrict access to life-saving information and significantly impede humanitarian operations. Targeted efforts must be made to counter harmful disinformation campaigns that put humanitarian and media personnel at risk. Likewise, the Council must ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice, as clearly stipulated in its resolutions.

Thirdly, the Council must take concrete steps to curb the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Recent large-scale civilian casualties have resulted both directly and indirectly from the use of explosive weapons in urban areas. In Gaza, dozens of Palestinians are being killed each day, with massive air strikes targeting such civilian infrastructure as hospitals and schools. In Port Sudan, drone attacks have struck water facilities and hospitals, leaving populations with acute shortages of food and medicine and exposing them to heightened risks of disease.

All parties to armed conflict must, as appropriate, refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, in accordance with the principles of distinction and proportionality. That understanding should be systematically integrated into rules of engagement, military training and operational planning. As a participating State, the Republic of Korea also encourages all Member States to adopt and implement the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

In conclusion, we must bear in mind that every discussion on the protection of civilians rests on a single imperative: compliance with international humanitarian law is non-negotiable. Impunity for its violation only paves the way for perpetrators to continue committing heinous crimes. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the International Criminal Court in its efforts to deliver justice for the most serious crimes under international law.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher, Executive Director Bahous, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Spoljaric Egger and Save the Children President Soeripto for their sobering briefings today.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2025/271) is a chilling reflection of our collective failure to protect civilians around the world. Famine has returned to the Sudan. Thousands of women and children have been killed in Gaza, and hostages are still being held by Hamas following the appalling attacks of 7 October 2023. Civilian infrastructure continues to be targeted in Ukraine. It does not need to be that way. The Security Council and the international community have the tools to protect civilians. We have an urgent duty to use them.

I will focus on three points.

First, in recent days, we have heard powerful accounts from senior United Nations officials of the gaps between the obligations of parties to conflict under international humanitarian law and their implementation. Those gaps are where harm to civilians arises every day in conflicts on the Council's agenda. But they are also where dangerous precedents are set, which risk fostering impunity. The Council should use the tools at its disposal to press all parties to conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and applicable international human rights law. Indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure must stop. There must also be an end to impunity. The United Kingdom will continue to stand behind the International Criminal Court as the court of last resort for the most serious crimes of international concern.

Secondly, as we heard, 2024 was the deadliest year on record for humanitarian workers. We call for the full implementation of resolution 2730 (2024) on the protection of humanitarian personnel, premises and assets, and we underscore the vital importance of ensuring safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

Thirdly, we must ensure that the United Nations can play its critical part in supporting the protection of civilians, especially through peace operations. Peacekeepers must be properly trained and equipped to fulfil protection mandates, and those mandates must be respected by parties to conflict.

The United Kingdom is taking practical steps to advance the protection of civilians, including through the ICRC's global initiative to galvanize political commitment to international humanitarian law. And this month, we published a practitioner's handbook to support compliance with international humanitarian law and better tackle conflict and hunger.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom remains fully committed to working with partners, including in the Council, to uphold our shared obligations to the protection of civilians and bring an end to impunity.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): I thank Under-Secretary-General Tom Fletcher and Under-Secretary-General Sima Bahous for their comprehensive briefings and welcome the contributions of Ms. Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Soeripto. We also welcome the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians (S/2025/271) and the recommendations contained therein.

The protection of civilians must remain at the centre of the international community's efforts to achieve global peace and security. Today the devastating consequences of armed conflicts continue to take a heavy toll on civilians worldwide by destroying infrastructure critical to their survival, creating large-scale displacement, inducing or exacerbating food insecurity and making them vulnerable to sexual violence, death and injury. Those dire consequences are exacerbated by the

impact of climate change and other destabilizing social and economic factors that are symptomatic of conflict zones.

The report of the Secretary-General states that, in 2024, the United Nations recorded more than 36,000 civilian deaths in 14 armed conflicts. The deliberate targeting of civilians, including humanitarian personnel and media professionals, coupled with the evolving nature of warfare, necessitates a collective response grounded in international law and demonstrated by firm political will. Over the years, there have been several Council products and other instruments, which form a robust framework for addressing issues relating to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. They include resolutions 1265 (1999), 2286 (2016), 2417 (2018), 2474 (2019), 2573 (2021) and 2730 (2024).

The implementation of those resolutions has, however, been mostly honoured in the breach, as the lives and livelihoods of civilians continue to be disrupted, with women and children bearing the brunt. The numbers are staggering. In Gaza, more than 53,000 Palestinians were killed by Israeli strikes between October 2023 and May 2025, the majority being women and children. More than 400 aid workers were killed in Gaza alone — the highest number in a single conflict. Those atrocities are all in violation of international law. Since the beginning of the conflict in the Sudan two years ago, 10.5 million persons have been displaced, and approximately 25 million are facing acute food insecurity. In Ukraine, more than 13,000 civilians have been killed since February 2022. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported a progressive rise in civilian casualties every month this year.

I have noted but a few of the atrocities resulting from the many conflicts worldwide, but the list goes on. The failure to protect civilians in armed conflict undermines the foundation of peace and security. Their full protection requires a comprehensive approach. In that regard, I highlight the following four points.

First, there must be strict adherence to international law and more specifically international humanitarian law, which are designed to protect civilians in armed conflict. They must not be interpreted or applied subjectively or treated like an à la carte menu from which we choose at our convenience. All parties to conflict bear the primary responsibility of ensuring the protection of civilians, whenever and wherever armed conflicts occur.

Secondly, there must be accountability. We must utilize the tools at our disposal to ensure that perpetrators who fail to protect or target civilians are held to account, as a necessary step to deter future violations. Guyana supports the call for prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigations into violations of international humanitarian law and calls for the strengthening of accountability mechanisms to deliver justice and enforce the rule of law.

Thirdly, the increasing use of misinformation and disinformation tools of war exacerbates conflict and instability. Equally devastating is when those mis- and disinformation campaigns target humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, thereby hindering the execution of their mandates and the lives of their personnel. We therefore encourage the responsible use of media platforms by digital entities and call for greater public access to accurate and reliable information. We further call for the monitoring of mis- and disinformation related to United Nations and humanitarian activities, and for those responsible for spreading harmful content to be held to account.

Fourthly and lastly, Guyana is deeply concerned about increased attacks against humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel. Even as they dedicate their own lives to alleviate human suffering, they have become targets in places like Ukraine and Gaza, suffering bodily harm and even death. That is unacceptable. Parties to

armed conflicts are obligated to respect and protect humanitarian workers and must adhere fully to those obligations.

The adoption of resolution 2730 (2024) underscores the critical importance of unhindered access for humanitarian personnel in the execution of their mandates, without intimidation, interference or violence. Deliberate obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid to conflict zones, including food and life-saving medical supplies, is not only a violation of international humanitarian law, but also exacerbates the suffering of the civilian populations. Guyana reiterates its call to all parties to conflicts to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and to ensure safe, timely and unhindered access to life-saving humanitarian aid.

The robust existing legal framework for the protection of civilians is not an end in itself. It must be matched with the same level of political will for its implementation and the relevant accountability when it is ignored.

Mr. Ahmad (Pakistan): Let me begin by expressing our sincere appreciation to you, Mr. Foreign Minister, for presiding over this important debate. We also thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General Bahus, International Committee of the Red Cross President Ms. Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Soeripto for their detailed and insightful briefings.

A crisis of compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law, the question of impunity and the imperative of justice and accountability, without politicization, selectivity and double standards, in our view were the key common messages from those briefings, and we commend them for their clarity and objectivity.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a binding obligation under international humanitarian law. The rights to life, dignity and security must remain sacrosanct, even amid the horrors of war.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/271) makes for grim reading. In 2024, more than 36,000 civilians were killed across 14 conflicts, and more than 122 million people were forcibly displaced. Today, with over 120 armed conflicts raging globally, we witness rising attacks on homes, hospitals, schools, water systems and humanitarian workers; denial of humanitarian access; and the emergence of weapons powered with artificial intelligence (AI) that kill without conscience.

From Gaza's ruins to Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, from the camps of the Sudan to the streets of Haiti, civilians are not collateral damage. They are the epicentre of those tragedies.

The people of Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir have endured more than 75 years of systemic violence and repression under Indian occupation. More than 100,000 Kashmiris have lost their lives. Thousands disappeared without a trace. Women have been subjected to sexual violence, and generations of children have grown up behind barbed wire and bunkers.

In gross violation of international law and humanitarian norms, over 900,000 Indian occupation troops continue to use excessive and indiscriminate force, extrajudicial killings and collective punishment in what is one of the world's most militarized zones.

Plans to alter the demographic composition of the Indian occupied territory are being pushed by the occupying authorities in violation of resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir and the Fourth Geneva Convention. The people of Jammu and Kashmir await the fulfilment of the right to self-determination, as enshrined in numerous resolutions.

Just weeks ago, between 6 and 10 May, India committed acts of blatant aggression against Pakistan, launching unprovoked missile, air and drone strikes, under false pretences and baseless allegations, in flagrant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and the Charter of the United Nations. Civilian areas, including homes and mosques, were deliberately targeted by Indian bombs, resulting in the deaths of 40 civilians, including 7 women and 15 children, and injuries to 121, including 10 women and 27 children.

In contrast, Pakistan's response was responsible, measured, targeted solely at military installations and in line with our inherent right to self-defence in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

In Gaza, 2 million people, 90 per cent of the population, have been displaced. The numbers defy comprehension. Since October 2023, more than 53,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 121,000 injured. Healthcare facilities alone have been attacked more than 300 times. That is a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented scale, to which the Council must respond.

Pakistan views favourably the proposal of a focused resolution on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as proposed by Algeria on behalf of the Group of Arab States, and we stand ready to work with all Council members for early action in that regard.

Civilian suffering has been acute in other conflict zones too, from Afghanistan to Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen and Ukraine. The list is long.

In 2024 alone, more than 280 million people faced acute food insecurity in conflict-affected regions, and more than 870 healthcare workers were killed or injured in 20 countries.

Protection must extend beyond civilians to include journalists, humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel. The year 2024 saw the highest recorded casualties among United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers, an intolerable trend that must never be normalized. Under-Secretary-General Fletcher quoted UNESCO regarding the killing of 53 journalists last year. The number was much higher, actually, which unfortunately the UNESCO secretariat has not properly reflected or condemned since the start of the Gaza conflict.

Wars today are not waged with bullets alone. Disinformation, often powered by AI, threatens civilian safety, inflames conflict and undermines humanitarian efforts.

To effectively protect civilians in armed conflict, we offer the following recommendations.

First, we must ensure strict compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions. We should do more to strengthen the protection of civilian mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Second, we must hold perpetrators accountable. Impunity for grave violations must end.

Third, we must prioritize the protection of populations under foreign occupation, including in Palestine and Kashmir.

Fourth, we must uphold obligations under resolution 2730 (2024) to protect humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel. Attacks against them must be treated as serious international crimes.

Fifth, we must prohibit lethal autonomous weapons that remove human judgment from life and death decisions. Human accountability must remain central.

Sixth, we should establish an international framework to counter disinformation, especially AI-generated content and hate speech in conflict settings.

Seventh, we should address root causes of conflict through prevention, dialogue and dispute resolution.

True protection begins before the first shot is fired. Pakistan reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We stand ready to work with all Member States to ensure that no child, no mother and no civilian should ever pay with their life in a conflict.

Mr. Alfaro de Alba (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening and presiding over this important debate. We are grateful for the valuable briefings of Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women; Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Janti Soeripto, President of Save the Children US.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict cannot remain an unfulfilled promise. Respect for international humanitarian law is neither an option or an idealistic aspiration: it is a legal, ethical and moral obligation incumbent upon all States, without exception. Its observance is the foundation for preserving human dignity even in the darkest scenarios of conflict.

The 2024 report (S/2025/271) paints a troubling picture. The number of grave violations against civilians has steadily increased. Women, children and persons with disabilities continue to be victims of killings, forced displacement, sexual violence, enforced disappearances and multiple forms of intolerable suffering.

Panama notes with concern the growing disregard for the rules governing the conduct of hostilities, developed over more than a century to ensure a minimum of humanity even in the midst of war. The use of prohibited weapons, deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure, hospitals, schools, markets and drinking water systems are crimes that must be unambiguously denounced and prosecuted without exception. Impunity and double standards in their application threaten to erode the legitimacy of the multilateral system, and with it the very foundations of the Council.

In that regard, we welcome efforts to strengthen accountability mechanisms, both at the national and international levels. We also highlight the role of the International Criminal Court in the investigation of war crimes and crimes against humanity. International justice cannot be selective or delayed: it must be universal, impartial and effective. Wherever suffering occurs, accountability must follow, without distinction.

Similarly, humanitarian assistance must be guaranteed in every conflict, without arbitrary restrictions or obstacles. The protection of medical and humanitarian personnel, who risk their lives to save others, must be a permanent priority. Their work represents the most caring face of humanity. The noble mission of journalists and diplomats is also unjustly under attack from hatred and absurd geopolitical vengeance. Yesterday's regrettable assassination of two young members of Israel's diplomatic team in Washington D.C. offers a chilling example of that risk, which we firmly condemn.

We also wish to highlight the disproportionate impact that armed conflict has on persons with disabilities, who face multiple barriers in conflict contexts: from physical injury and psychological trauma to the collapse of essential services. For children with disabilities, those difficulties are further compounded, affecting their right to education, health and psychosocial support.

For that reason, we deeply value the work of civil society organizations that, with courage and commitment, protect the rights of this historically invisible group, as well as that of other sectors of the population, such as men and the elderly, who are also victims of armed conflict and have not yet been collectively categorized.

The year 2024 witnessed an alarming escalation in food insecurity and water scarcity, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict. More than 280 million people faced critical levels of acute hunger, exacerbated by deliberate attacks on markets, crops, logistical networks and distribution systems. The use of hunger as a weapon of war constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law and must be strongly condemned by this Organization.

In that context, we share the concern expressed by the Secretary-General about the humanitarian situation in the Sudan and Gaza, where millions of people are living on the brink of famine. The collapse of essential services, such as drinking water, electricity and healthcare, has created living conditions that border on inhumane. Also, the systematic destruction of critical infrastructure such as dams, pumping stations and power systems exacerbates humanitarian crises and deprives communities of sustainable livelihoods. We cannot look the other way. We must act with urgency and determination to prevent an even greater humanitarian catastrophe.

We therefore underscore the importance of protecting this infrastructure, as mandated by the resolution 2417 (2018), and welcome initiatives such as the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts which seeks to preserve vital resources even in contexts of violence.

In addition, the number of people displaced by violence has reached unprecedented levels. This crisis, beyond its tragic humanitarian dimension, represents a concrete threat to regional and international stability.

Although the current outlook is alarming, we do not lack tools. There are norms, mechanisms, agreements and multilateral platforms capable of bringing about change. However, political will, ethical coherence and collective leadership are needed. The notorious business of arms trafficking, in all of its modalities and dimensions, must be curbed. It is complicit in contributing to violence against civilians in many conflicts, inexplicably benefiting its manufacturers. The uncontrolled flow of small arms to rival gangs in Haiti serves as a reprehensible and timely example in that regard.

The protection of civilians must be a common cause; it cannot depend on the geopolitical context or particular interests. The Council, which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, must be a guarantor of that cause. We therefore urge the Council to act with determination, to place human life at the centre of decisions and not to allow indifference to become normalized.

Panama will stand on the side of principles, of international legality and, above all, of the victims of armed violence, without distinction of any kind — because we believe that, even in the midst of armed conflicts, humanity must prevail.

Mr. Totangi (Sierra Leone): I thank Your Excellency Mr. Gerapetritis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, for convening this very important open debate and for presiding over same. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General Bahous and Ms. Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for their important and sobering briefings. I take note of the contribution of the President and Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children US.

Sierra Leone reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, grounded in international humanitarian law and international human rights law. As co-Chair of workstream 4, on protecting civilian

infrastructure — a part of the global initiative to galvanize political commitment to international humanitarian law, launched in September 2024 by Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Africa and the ICRC — Sierra Leone is advancing practical recommendations for safeguarding civilians and essential infrastructure in conflict zones. The Security Council first authorized a protection of civilians mandate in resolution 1270 (1999), establishing the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. Yet, more than two decades on, civilians continue to suffer the gravest consequences of conflict, despite the Council's consistent efforts.

The Secretary-General's 2025 report (S/2025/271) underscores the devastating impact of more than 120 ongoing conflicts globally. Civilian casualties remain unacceptably high, particularly as a result of the use of improvised explosive devices and weapons with wide-area effects in densely populated areas. We are deeply alarmed by the 4,500 reported cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2024, 93 per cent of which affected women and girls. Survivors often face insurmountable barriers to healthcare, legal redress and psychosocial support. The emergence of digital threats, such as doxing and sexualized cyberviolence, only compounds those risks.

Sierra Leone categorically condemns the militarization of health and educational facilities. Using hospitals or schools for military purposes places civilians, including patients, pupils, students and staff, in grave danger and undermines access to essential services. We are especially concerned about the continued recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. On the basis of our commitment to the climate, peace and security agenda, we must highlight the growing nexus between conflict, climate shocks and food insecurity. In conflict situations, such as those in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Palestine, the Sudan and parts of West Africa and the Sahel, those compounded crises are displacing millions and destabilizing entire communities, as a result of the intersection of conflict, climate change and food insecurity.

Returning to the theme of today's debate, Sierra Leone strongly condemns the alarming surge in attacks on humanitarian personnel. With more than 360 aid workers killed in 2024, it marked the deadliest year on record for humanitarian staff. We reaffirm our support for resolution 2730 (2024) and stress that such attacks are war crimes. Perpetrators must be held accountable. We also call for the unconditional release of all humanitarian personnel who are unlawfully detained.

Equally disturbing is the targeted killing of journalists. Of the 82 journalists killed in 2024, 53 were in conflict-affected areas. As a signatory to the global pledge on media freedom, Sierra Leone urges all parties to conflicts to respect international humanitarian law and protect journalists and media professionals. We also call on States to adopt robust national frameworks that safeguard journalistic independence and integrity.

To address impunity and systematic violations of international humanitarian law, Sierra Leone supports the full protection of civilians approach outlined in the Secretary-General's report. Peacekeeping operations must be authorized with robust mandates, prioritizing the safety of civilians, ensuring humanitarian access and supporting the protection of displaced populations, especially women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Effective protection mandates should be supported by capacity-building, especially in international humanitarian law and protection protocols for peacekeepers and community actors. We further propose a strengthened monitoring scheme to track the implementation of Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians, thereby enabling States to develop and refine legal and institutional frameworks at the national and regional levels.

From a regional perspective, we commend the African Union (AU) for its normative and operational contributions to the protection of civilians. The AU's

Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force and the African Union policy framework on post-conflict reconstruction and development are critical tools. With their strong protection of civilians component, the different iterations of the AU Mission in Somalia — the African Union Mission in Somalia, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia and the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia — have demonstrated the viability of regional approaches to civilian protection. The AU's coordination with the Economic Community of West African States, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and other subregional bodies has further amplified efforts to respond swiftly to emerging crises. We believe that deeper AU-United Nations cooperation, anchored in Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, is vital to translating early warnings into early action. Enhancing African-led peace support operations, supported by predictable and sustainable financing, will strengthen our collective capacity to protect civilians where it matters most.

Let me close by affirming unequivocally that the protection of civilians in armed conflicts is not only a legal and moral imperative, but also the cornerstone of lasting peace. Sierra Leone reiterates its deep commitment to conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The Pact for the Future (General Assembly resolution 79/1) rightly calls for strengthened efforts to protect civilians, and we stand ready to support that call, ensuring that no one caught in conflict is forgotten or left behind.

Ms. Shea (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General Bahous, International Committee of the Red Cross President Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Soeripto for their informative briefings.

Over the past year, we have witnessed unprecedented levels of civilian death, injury and displacement. As we have heard, more than 120 armed conflicts are ongoing, creating a devastating and unacceptable human toll. Far too many civilians have suffered. The United States, under the leadership of President Trump, is committed to ending those conflicts. We call on all parties to those conflicts to take every feasible measure to mitigate civilian harm.

The war in the Sudan is the cause of the world's largest humanitarian crisis. There is no durable military solution to that conflict. We call on the warring parties to cease hostilities, allow unhindered humanitarian access and protect civilians. The Russia-Ukraine war has had especially devastating effects on civilians and civilian infrastructure. President Trump has made clear that that violence must also end. We call for an immediate ceasefire and for Russia to allow humanitarian workers to access areas under its control.

In Gaza, civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. Every day, Hamas demonstrates its disregard for the Palestinian people, whom it purports to represent. Its use of civilians as human shields is deplorable. We expect all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. Members of the Security Council have a responsibility to use the tools of this body to enforce peace. We can and should impose consequences on those who engage in conduct that is prohibited by sanctions and arms embargoes.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the Greek presidency for convening this open debate today. I also extend our gratitude to the briefers — Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Ms. Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women; Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Janti Soeripto, President and Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2025/271), which paints a troubling picture.

In 2024, more than 36,000 civilians were killed in 14 conflicts, and more than 122 million people were forcibly displaced by mid-year — a dramatic rise. Essential services such as electricity, healthcare, water and education have been destroyed, leaving millions in need. Humanitarian and United Nations staff still face violence and severe restrictions, blocking vital aid. Nowhere are those stakes clearer than in Palestine, and especially in Gaza, where the scale of civilian suffering, displacement and destruction is intolerable. The siege of Gaza has brought the population to the brink of famine. Nearly 70 per cent of all structures were damaged or destroyed by the end of the year, with 1.9 million people — almost 90 per cent of the population — displaced and up to 86 per cent facing acute food insecurity. Starvation is now being used as a method of warfare — children, women and the elderly are being deprived of life-saving food, water and medicine. As we recently learned from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, at least 273 aid workers have been killed since the start of the hostilities — the highest number ever recorded in any conflict. The targeting of humanitarian workers and medical facilities constitutes a grave breach of international humanitarian law, and those responsible must be held fully accountable.

The Security Council must act to protect civilians and guarantee humanitarian access. Conflict is spreading, and new technologies are being used in ways that increase harm. International humanitarian law is too often ignored or twisted, eroding the standards meant to limit suffering. Our credibility depends on enforcing those norms, not just calling for compliance. Civilians bear the brunt of these crises. Technology can amplify hate speech and disinformation, thereby putting journalists and media and humanitarian workers at risk and threatening democratic values. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable, facing higher risks of violence and losing access to critical support. Protecting humanitarian and United Nations personnel, journalists and media professionals is urgent. Last year, more than 360 humanitarian workers were killed, and most of them were local staff. Their dedication should inspire our strongest commitment to their safety.

I want to stress the following priorities. To resolve these conflicts, locally led peacebuilding must remain at the heart of our approach by empowering those most affected by violence to lead. The Security Council and Member States must uphold international humanitarian law, enforce resolutions and ensure accountability for violations. Coordination among the United Nations, Member States, regional bodies and non-governmental organizations is essential in order to shield civilians, counter disinformation and ensure that counter-terrorism efforts do not block humanitarian work. We must address the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and children and act decisively against sexual and gender-based violence. Attacks on humanitarian and United Nations staff, journalists and media professionals must stop. We must also combat disinformation, hate speech and technology misuse, which endanger civilians. Somalia deeply appreciates humanitarian and aid workers. Their courage and sacrifice show the best of humankind. Attacks on them or our shared values must be met with real protection.

Protecting civilians in conflict is both a legal duty and a moral imperative that shapes the credibility of the United Nations. We call on all Member States to honour international law, support the Secretary-General's recommendations and work together to safeguard civilians. It is important to reaffirm our commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and to protecting the most vulnerable. Millions of lives and hopes depend on what we do together.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the briefers for their contributions to today's discussion.

Civilians around the world continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts. In 2024, the United Nations registered 36,000 civilian deaths in 14 armed conflicts

around the world. It is notable that we have not received a country-specific breakdown. However, an analysis of open sources suggests that approximately half of those people were killed in Gaza and the West Bank, where the bloody conflict continues. Last year, at a similar meeting, we discussed the famine in Gaza. This year, according to the Secretary-General's report (S/2025/271), 86 per cent of the people of the Strip live in conditions of acute food insecurity or artificially created famine, and they are dying from it. Nineteen out of 36 hospitals there have been destroyed. Children have been out of school for almost two years now. Attacks on humanitarian workers continue. The question arises as to why no progress has been made in the protection of civilians in Gaza throughout the conflict. The answer is obvious — it is because of the stalled peace settlement, which does not allow for the improvement of the situation of civilians, including women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

What we find relevant in the Secretary-General's report is the conclusion that the evaluation of whether an action is legal or illegal under international humanitarian law is something that, in the modern world, depends largely on political preferences. Indeed, that is precisely what we are regularly witnessing in the Council. However, it is totally unacceptable when some political preferences become the basis of United Nations reports. For example, in the part that deals with Ukraine, the Secretary-General's report prepared for today's meeting mentions the Russian civilians affected by the conflict only once and only in the context of displaced persons. At the same time, it is not explained that we are talking about hundreds of civilians abducted by the Ukrainian armed forces in the Kursk region, who are now being used as hostages. The following question arises — are there are no killed or wounded Russian civilians according to the Secretariat? Are there no attacks on civilian objects or civilian infrastructure? Why is that information completely missing from the report?

Last year, in a similar statement, we provided all the necessary statistics covering the whole year, and we regularly provide the United Nations with that kind of information in writing. If members do not believe us, they only need look at the open sources and they will see that, in 2024, according to the most minimal estimates, the number of affected Russian civilians approached 5,500 people, more than 800 of whom were killed. Approximately 300 minors were injured and maimed, and 51 children died. Most civilian casualties were caused by the shelling of civilian infrastructure using explosive weapons and small arms and light weapons, most of which were foreign-manufactured. Just look at the issue of Ukrainian drone operators tracking civilian vehicles in front-line areas. The report also mentions the International Court of Justice's appeal to States not to supply arms to those parties to armed conflicts that violate international humanitarian law. Yet there is no mention whatsoever of the continued supply of weapons to the Kyiv regime.

What the report does mention are the alleged 300 attacks on energy infrastructure in Ukraine. It fails, however, to explain that those facilities serve military units, and the figures were taken at face value from the Ukrainian side. The report even stoops, unacceptably and baselessly, to spreading Western lies about children being separated from their parents and forcibly removed from the country.

Another important matter under discussion today is the safety of journalists in armed conflicts. Kyiv has been terrorizing Russian media professionals in the conduct of their professional duty, reporting on what is happening in the area of the special military operation. The number of those killed and wounded since February 2022 is in double digits. Five Russian media workers have been killed and many more have been injured since the beginning of this year alone, as a result of targeted attacks by the Ukrainian armed forces, including using precision missile systems.

Yet again, despite our regular appeals, those crimes have not been in any way condemned by the United Nations. The UNESCO Director General's report on the

safety of journalists and the danger of impunity, covering 2022 and 2023, is a glaring example of that cynicism. The report completely ignores the numerous instances of Russian correspondents being killed by the Ukrainian armed forces. There are references to UNESCO data on journalists killed in the report of the Secretary-General. Once again, we lack objective information.

The report notes the fight against impunity in Ukraine. I wonder what that conclusion is based on, given that when Ukraine ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), it even included a reservation exempting its troops from the responsibility for war crimes.

We believe that the report's description of the situation in Ukraine is something that merits official investigation. How can we discuss the protection of civilians after such blatant lies and fraud? We must find out what is happening within the Secretariat itself and bring the authors to account for attempting to mislead the Security Council.

The duty to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law lies with every State. The efforts of national justice systems form the foundation of the fight against impunity. We do not understand why, every year, the report covers the activities of the ICC — a separate entity that has nothing to do with the United Nations. The ICC is mired in politicization and double standards and is notorious for its ineffectiveness. The report's call for States to accede to the statute of that puppet tribunal is totally inappropriate. The ICC's ineffectiveness is only rivalled by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, which was also praised in the report. That body, and its predecessor, the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, cost the United Nations billions of dollars and became a byword for double standards and selective justice.

It is hard to understand why the document contains praise for the trials conducted in a number of Western countries on the basis of universal jurisdiction. Let me recall, in that regard, that Western States have long been abusing the notion of universal jurisdiction, exploiting it to interfere in the internal affairs of developing countries or States they simply dislike, including by ignoring the norms of international customary law. Such actions amount to wrongful acts, as was confirmed by the International Court of Justice. African countries, which are deeply concerned about the abuse of universal jurisdiction, initiated a discussion on the topic in the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly, reflecting the substantial divergence of views on that issue.

We would like to stress the matter of the protection of civilians as part of peacekeeping mandates. The protection of civilians is a temporary measure, necessary to buy time to allow for a political and diplomatic solution to a conflict. It is also important to understand that it is a matter for national Governments and their security forces. When peacekeeping missions have a mandate to protect civilians, it must be implemented comprehensively and in close cooperation with national authorities, local communities and relevant humanitarian organizations. However, the main role in the protection of civilians must be played by the military and police contingents of peacekeeping operations, which ensure the direct protection of the most vulnerable groups, sometimes at the cost of their own lives. In that regard, there must be progress in security sector reform and professional training for security personnel; otherwise, it will be impossible to achieve sustainable results. That area has not always received enough attention.

Further thought needs to be given to whether it is appropriate to include the protection of civilians in peacekeeping mandates that already embrace such areas as human rights monitoring, gender issues and the prevention of sexual violence. That may lead to improper connections among political, human rights and humanitarian

activities. To what extent that improves overall effectiveness is a big question, but it clearly increases expectations, which are not always fulfilled. Furthermore, in a number of cases, human rights monitoring is used to exert political pressure on a Government, which is completely unacceptable. Nor do we see how special political missions or United Nations humanitarians on their own can actually protect civilians facing the threat of violence.

In conclusion, we would like to draw your attention to another finding in the Secretary-General's report, namely the deterioration in the situation of the protection of civilians over the past 150 years, after the relevant norms were created. We cannot agree with that statement.

Regardless of how difficult the situation of civilians in armed conflicts may be today, it cannot be compared to what happened more than 80 years ago, during the Second World War, on the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. During the three years of the occupation of Soviet territory by the German Nazis, more than 13 million civilians were killed. Meanwhile, despite the Nuremberg Tribunal verdict, a significant proportion of the most abhorrent Nazis remained at large. Western countries, which are so much in favour of fighting impunity today, calmly considered the situation, then sheltered and allowed numerous Nazi criminals to escape punishment.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister of Transport, Communication and Works of Cyprus.

Mr. Vafeades (Cyprus): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this timely debate on a matter of urgent moral and legal significance. We also extend our appreciation to the briefers for their insightful remarks.

Cyprus fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union, and I wish to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Despite the commitment made with the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, grave violations of humanitarian and human rights law persist across the globe.

Civilians are increasingly under attack and disproportionately affected. Forced displacement is rising, and the number of missing persons continues to grow. Cyprus, having experienced foreign aggression first-hand, fully understands the human cost of such suffering.

That worsening situation demands renewed commitment to international law and the United Nations Charter. The year 2025 offers key opportunities to reaffirm our shared commitments.

First, we mark 20 years since the World Summit Outcome Document (General Assembly resolution 60/1) reaffirmed our collective responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We welcome the continued reflection of that principle in resolutions of the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council. But more must be done — early-warning capabilities and concrete support for States are essential.

Secondly, we recall two landmark Security Council resolutions — resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security. They underscore the need for all-inclusive approaches to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.

Thirdly, we must not overlook the humanitarian dimension of missing persons. International cooperation must be strengthened to address that issue, especially in protracted situations in which the fate of the missing has remained unknown for

decades — as is the case for Cyprus. We urge the Council to build on resolution 2474 (2019) by incorporating stronger and more consistent provisions in its future resolutions — particularly in situations where the fate and whereabouts of missing persons remain unknown, such as in Cyprus.

Fourthly, the protection of humanitarian and United Nations personnel must remain a top priority. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2730 (2024) and call for its full implementation.

In conclusion, we commend the vital work of the International Committee of the Red Cross around the world and express gratitude for the support it has also provided to the people of Cyprus. We also extend our appreciation to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus for exercising its humanitarian mandate in providing relief to the displaced, assisting in locating missing persons and facilitating normal living conditions for the enclaved.

We firmly believe that all United Nations Members must demonstrate genuine resolve in protecting civilians in armed conflicts. The Security Council must continue to fulfil its core mandate while also improving its working methods and strengthening its relationship with the General Assembly.

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

Mr. Darsalia (Georgia): At the outset, let me thank the Hellenic presidency for convening this important and timely debate.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the European Union, and I would like to make some remarks in my national capacity.

The Security Council has a central role in strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law. In these turbulent times, ensuring the effective implementation of its resolutions related to the protection of civilians is as vital as ever.

Since the adoption of landmark resolution 1265 (1999), the Council has established a comprehensive normative framework for the protection of civilians, particularly vulnerable groups such as internally displaced persons, women and children, who bear the brunt of the severe consequences of wars and armed conflicts. Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's 2024 report (S/2025/271) highlights the record-high level of civilian harm, displacement and attacks on essential services. The report, therefore, once again rightly stresses the urgent need for respect of international humanitarian law and ensuring accountability.

We are especially concerned about the increasing number of attacks against civilian population and infrastructure, in violation of international humanitarian law. The targeting of humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as United Nations peacekeepers and journalists, including women, remains a concern and further increases their exposure to serious risks.

Georgia strongly supports the implementation of the Security Council mandates aimed at protecting civilians and ensuring humanitarian access. The protection of civilians obviously encompasses actions aimed at the full respect of international humanitarian law, fighting impunity and ensuring accountability.

Regrettably, Russia's ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine continues to entail immense civilian suffering, with the losses of thousands of lives, including of the most vulnerable, in violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

We strongly believe that respecting international humanitarian law and international human rights law remains the only sustainable path towards strengthening the protection of civilians. Georgia remains firmly committed to

this principle, both domestically and globally. As a State party to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, Georgia continues to strengthen national compliance through the Inter-Agency Commission of International Humanitarian Law, a permanent Government body responsible for coordinating the implementation of international humanitarian law.

Emerging challenges such as disinformation, hate speech and the misuse of digital technologies increasingly put civilians at risk and undermine humanitarian operations. We encourage the Security Council and United Nations system to enhance efforts to protect its personnel, mandates and affected populations from information warfare while reinforcing trust in facts, dialogue and international law.

Georgia's experience reflects the severe impact of continued occupation. Since the early 1990s, and especially after Russia's 2008 full-scale military aggression, civilians in Russian-occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia have faced grave human rights abuses, including deprivation of life, torture and ill-treatment, restrictions of the freedom of movement and denial of access to healthcare and education in their native language. Russia's occupation hinders Georgia's ability to protect those vulnerable communities.

Unfortunately, the practice of illegal detention and kidnapping of Georgian citizens continues every year. If we are to avoid tragic consequences similar to those of previous cases, a humanitarian approach is necessary to ensure their immediate release. In that regard, let me recall that the European Court of Human Rights and the International Criminal Court have confirmed Russia's responsibility for serious human rights violations in Georgia's occupied territories. These findings underscore the need for strengthened international accountability mechanisms and reinforcing our calls for adherence to international humanitarian law.

We also reiterate our call upon the Russian Federation to begin to fulfil its international obligations, first and foremost, under the European Union-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to the protection of civilians and to the endeavours of the international community to that end.

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

I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of 27 members of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

I would also like to start by thanking the briefers for their remarks.

As we have heard today, armed conflicts have continued unabated, with a sharp rise in both the number of active conflicts across the globe — the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross spoke today of 130 — and the number of civilians affected. Civilians increasingly bear the brunt of armed conflicts. Women, children and persons with disabilities are the most disproportionately impacted. Journalists and humanitarian personnel, in particular national and locally recruited personnel, are also affected. This has to change.

Several key trends affect the protection of civilians. These include the use of indiscriminate means and methods of warfare, misuses of new technologies and the widespread dissemination of disinformation, as well as hate speech, the use of conflict-related sexual violence and an increase in deliberate attacks on civilians,

including specific population groups or humanitarian personnel, and civilian infrastructure. Persistent obstruction, instrumentalization and denial of humanitarian access are depriving populations of much-needed assistance and protection and may lead to catastrophic levels of food insecurity. Civilian vulnerability is being further exacerbated by the pushback against international human rights law, in particular with regard to the rights of women and girls, as we heard again today from the representative of UN-Women. Climate change and natural disasters also further aggravate the plight of civilians in armed conflict. Alarming, international humanitarian law is being increasingly undermined and violated.

The targeting of civilians and civilian objects and the resulting surge in human suffering cannot become the new normal. Concrete action is needed to reaffirm that such acts are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

To that end, the Group of Friends would like to underline three points.

First, persistent international humanitarian law violations do not render these rules irrelevant. Rather, they show the lack of political will to respect them. We must urgently elevate respect for international humanitarian law as a political priority and collectively work towards its strict compliance. The Security Council has repeatedly reaffirmed international humanitarian law obligations through numerous resolutions under the protection-of-civilians agenda, while the International Court of Justice has contributed to its interpretation. In order to translate binding commitments into action, monitoring and accountability mechanisms must be implemented. Other tools play a critical role in the protection of civilians, 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, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration. We encourage Member States to consider endorsing those instruments. We also welcome ongoing efforts such as the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law and the development of a declaration for the protection of humanitarian personnel, led by a cross-regional ministerial group and informed by humanitarian partners.

Secondly, perpetrators must be held to account. Violations must not be met with silence or inaction. Independent investigations and prosecutions do not only meet a legal obligation, but are also critical for breaking cycles of impunity and restoring faith in the rule of law. In that regard, appropriate national and international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, play a vital role. Adequate support should be provided to survivors, affected families and communities in accordance with their rights and needs.

Thirdly, humanitarian action must always include efforts aimed at upholding the individual's rights and at reducing violence and mitigating its impact, including through support for political solutions. Protection is an integral part of humanitarian action. In the light of the pressing reforms in all sectors, including the humanitarian system, resources and capacities for prevention, protection and mitigation must be strengthened.

The members of the Group of Friends will continue their steadfast advocacy for the full protection of civilians. We call on the Security Council and the States Members of the United Nations to act with determination and unity to uphold international humanitarian law, at all times and in all circumstances.

(spoke in French)

Allow me to add a few words in my national capacity.

Let us be clear: whether it be in the Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or anywhere else, the protection of civilians in armed conflict cannot be reduced to a question of goodwill. It is an obligation

incumbent upon all parties to conflicts, in all circumstances, even if the adversary does not respect it. We must not wait for this annual meeting to take stock of the failures in this area and to call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law. As States, we must act together to improve the protection of civilians, in partnership with international and non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society. The involvement of a growing number of partners in the eighth Protection of Civilians Week, which my delegation has the honour of coordinating alongside the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Center for Civilians in Conflict and the International Rescue Committee, demonstrates the will and urgency behind that joint action.

During our recent term on the Security Council, we worked to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, particularly the protection of children in armed conflict, to put an end to conflict-induced hunger and the use of famine as a weapon of war and to ensure the protection of essential water infrastructure. In addition, we worked to bring about the recognition of climate change as a factor exacerbating instability and the suffering of civilians. In response to the alarming increase in attacks against humanitarian and United Nations personnel, including national and locally recruited staff, Switzerland submitted resolution 2730 (2024). As co-penholder of resolution 2761 (2024), we worked to ensure that humanitarian exemptions to the financial sanctions regime against Da'esh and Al-Qaida were made permanent. We call for the full implementation of those resolutions and all normative instruments aimed at protecting the civilian population during armed conflicts.

Switzerland remains fully committed to the protection of civilians and will continue working to that end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rae (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on organizing this meeting, and I commend all the speakers on their presentations.

Gaza, Haiti, Myanmar, the Sudan, Ukraine and many other places — I mentioned each of those conflicts during the open debate held one year ago (see S/PV.9675). In each conflict, the situation of civilians has deteriorated. Many other conflicts are also getting worse. But what is the problem? The problem is not a problem with international law. International law is in place, comprehensive and clear. The problem is not in our stars. The problem lies in the activity of men and women, politicians and States — that is the problem.

(*spoke in English*)

We welcome the Security Council's contributions to this debate, including resolution 2730 (2024), on the protection of humanitarians, and resolution 2764 (2024), on child protection. We also recognize that peace operations are themselves a protective act. Peace operations come under the Charter of the United Nations, and they are carried out by the Security Council. And we pay tribute — and we will have a chance to do even more of that in the next few weeks — to all those peacekeepers who have given their lives and everything to the cause of international peace.

We must understand that, when the Council itself is silenced by use or threat of the veto, when the Charter itself is set aside by members of the Council, belligerents are emboldened. After all, after the Council adopted resolution 2774 (2025), which neither acknowledges Ukraine's sovereignty nor calls for accountability for Russia's aggression, civilian deaths increased. The first thing we would do, then, is to urge Council members to stand firm, to uphold the Charter and, as it tells us to do, to protect the worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

The Charter also gives the Secretary-General the capacity to intervene to carry out his work as mediator and, as a mediator, to deal with the basis of conflict. And as we all know, the Peacebuilding Commission is working in exactly those areas. And we know that there are many locally led peacebuilding efforts that have proven to be among the most effective in dealing with those challenges. Canada is committed to giving priority to humanitarian action that is led by local, women-led organizations in which women and girls play a central role in informing and addressing needs and priorities and in setting a path to recovery.

We call on all Members to uphold the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, to ratify the Rome Statute and to support the International Criminal Court. We take exception to the remarks by the Russian representative, who referred to the Court as some kind of kangaroo operation. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

We must remember that the dilemma that we face on the weakness of enforcement lies at the very heart of the challenge of international law. Pascal, the famous French philosopher, reminded us that justice without enforcement is powerless. But he also told us that power without justice is in fact tyranny. That means that, when we fail to subject the exercise of power, either within our countries or internationally, to the rule of law, wherever that exercise takes place, we are in fact condoning tyranny, abuse and impunity around the world.

Canada will continue to engage as a humanitarian donor, to safeguard the operating space of our humanitarian partners to work as well in international development, and finally, we will continue to work in making sure that conflicts of this kind do not take place in the future.

Finally, if I may say so, Mr. President, my good friend — think of your own country. Think of how it has known war and how it has also known peace. And think of how, even recently, it has seen the importance of dialogue getting at the origin of political conflicts to allow the situation between it and other countries to allow peace to be created. If we had been having this debate in the early 1920s, it would be a very different debate, because Greece itself experienced such a degree of hardship and of the loss and movement of population, the creation of refugees and attacks on civilians. Greece knows whereof we speak — therefore, for Greece to be sponsoring this debate today is only appropriate.

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 this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m.