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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Stamatekos	(Greece)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria.	Ms. Gasmi
	China.	Mr. He Mao
	Denmark	Mr. Bay
	France	Mr. Briere
	Guyana	Ms. Parmanand
	Pakistan.	Ms. Saleem
	Panama	Mr. Pittí Jiménez
	Republic of Korea	Ms. Jang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kondratev
	Sierra Leone	Ms. Karim
	Slovenia.	Mrs. Ponikvar
	Somalia	Mr. Ibrahim
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Xheleshi
	United States of America.	Mr. Adelman

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 suspended at 6.05 p.m. on Thursday, 22 May and resumed on Friday, 23 May at 10 a.m.

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 Viet Nam.

Mr. Hoang Nguyen Nguyen (Viet Nam): I thank Greece for convening this important debate and express my appreciation to yesterday's briefers for their insights on this critical issue.

Last year we commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions, the universal instruments that have become customary international law, binding on all parties to any form of armed conflict. Over the years, the Council has adopted landmark resolutions setting out our responsibilities and measures to strengthen the protection of civilians, particularly children, women, humanitarian personnel, United Nations staff and journalists. Yet, despite that well established normative framework, civilians around the world continue to bear the brunt of armed conflict. Clearly, the challenges lie not only in the absence of rules, but in the lack of compliance.

Having endured and overcome the devastation of wars, Viet Nam fully understands the profound human and development toll of armed conflict. It is that history that underpins our unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians.

During our Security Council presidency in April 2021, Viet Nam spearheaded the adoption of resolution 2573 (2021) on safeguarding critical civilian infrastructure in conflicts. We also authored a presidential statement on mine action (S/PRST/2021/8) and presided over an open debate on conflict-related sexual violence (see S/2021/375) and, later that year, an Arria-formula meeting on parental care for unattended children during conflicts. In addition, through its active participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, Viet Nam has effectively contributed to the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and United Nations staff on the ground.

Drawing from our national experience and engagement at the Security Council, I wish to highlight a number of points on strengthening political and practical commitments to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, the protection of civilians is both a humanitarian imperative and a legal obligation. The safety of United Nations staff, humanitarian and media personnel is non-negotiable. Member States should continue to reinforce international humanitarian law and norms, thereby fostering a broader culture of compliance.

Secondly, we call for a systematic inclusion of the protection of civilians in all relevant mandates and deliberations at the Security Council. The Council should also take a strong and consistent stand against attacks on critical civilian infrastructure and the weaponization of water, food and humanitarian services.

Thirdly, more diplomatic and multi-stakeholder initiatives need to be encouraged. Viet Nam supports efforts such as the global initiative on international humanitarian law and the annual protection of civilians week, which should move from advocacy to the promotion of practical progress, including enhanced peer-to-peer legal cooperation, especially among countries in the global South, to ensure that protection norms are responsive to realities on the ground and better tailored to address the existing compliance gaps.

To protect civilians is to protect our shared humanity. Viet Nam remains firmly committed to working with all Member States, international partners and stakeholders in that common cause.

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

Mr. Leal Matta (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala thanks the Greek presidency for convening this open debate, allowing us to advance a substantive discussion on the urgent need to protect civilians in armed conflict, especially in the face of emerging threats that challenge international order and human dignity.

For Guatemala, as a country firmly committed to multilateralism, the peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for international humanitarian law, the protection of life, human dignity and the integrity of individuals are an essential priority of its foreign policy. Under no circumstances should armed conflict be a pretext for trampling on the fundamental rights of the civilian population.

As an international community, we have an inescapable duty to ensure the safety and protection of civilians, especially the most vulnerable groups — women, children, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and internally displaced persons. Human rights are not suspended in times of war; on the contrary, that is when they must be most firmly defended. Sexual violence as a weapon of war, the forced recruitment of children, deliberate attacks on hospitals and schools and the use of starvation as a military tactic are crimes that must be prevented, condemned and punished.

Today, we are faced with a global landscape marked by new and complex challenges that not only harm civilian populations but also undermine the principles on which the United Nations was founded.

From our experience, as a country that experienced an internal armed conflict that lasted more than three decades, we fully understand the human impact of prolonged violence. We recognize the value of transitional justice, respect for human rights and accountability as paths to lasting peace. We reaffirm, therefore, our support for international mechanisms that promote accountability for atrocity crimes, in particular the work of the International Criminal Court.

The Council must remain vigilant when it comes to the protection of civilians in the mandates it discusses, and continue to strengthen conflict prevention through dialogue, preventive diplomacy and the strengthening of the rule of law, fostering permanent channels of communication and demanding accountability for serious violations.

In conclusion, Guatemala calls for the protection of human rights to be at the centre of any multilateral response to conflict, and for the protection of United Nations humanitarian personnel and journalists, who play essential roles in humanitarian assistance, transparency and accountability, to be respected and guaranteed.

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

Mr. Hachem (Lebanon): At the outset, allow me to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Greece on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. We also express our deep appreciation to France for its effective leadership during last month's presidency.

When we tackle the theme of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, the first thing that comes to mind is the stark and unprecedented disregard for that fundamental principle that prevails today. Far too often, civilians, humanitarian workers, United Nations personnel, peacekeepers and journalists are targeted — all too deliberately. Their safety is disregarded, and their rights are violated with full impunity.

In our numerous conversations with first responders during the most recent Israeli aggression against Lebanon, one plea from the Lebanese Red Cross came through again and again: “We need protection!” Those words echo the urgent plea of those on the front lines, risking their lives to save others. Their call is a stark reminder that humanitarian workers, like the civilians they serve, must be safeguarded. Protecting those who protect others is not just a moral duty, it is an imperative — a legal one that must be upheld without exception.

As we witness multilateralism under deliberate attack, international law undermined and the protection of civilians more precarious than ever, we gather in this Chamber and ask ourselves: What can we do? How do we restore faith in the principles that uphold human dignity and shield the innocent from the horrors of war?

First, we must reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the Charter of the United Nations, to international human rights law and to international humanitarian law. Those are not optional norms; they are the foundation of any credible system of protection.

Secondly, we must move beyond words of condemnation to concrete, collective action. Inaction has only deepened a culture of impunity.

Thirdly, we must demand accountability and support existing international mechanisms that investigate and respond to serious violations. Impunity does not just deny justice, it emboldens perpetrators and ensures the cycle of suffering continues.

Finally, we must protect and enable humanitarian action on the ground. That means ensuring unimpeded access for humanitarian workers — from United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations alike — so they can reach civilians in need safely and effectively.

Failure to uphold international law today means compounding the suffering of those already trapped in devastation. It means allowing the cycle of atrocities to continue, unchecked, with more lives lost, more communities torn apart, more humanitarian crises exacerbated. The longer we allow impunity to persist, the more lives are shattered and the more we risk reinforcing a culture of violence and lawlessness.

As Agence France-Presse journalist Christina Assi, who lost a leg in an Israeli deliberate attack in southern Lebanon in 2023, and who became an advocate for the safety of journalists, recently said in her intervention in the Press Freedom Centre Forum:

“Our duty is to make sure that the world does not look away. Justice is about remembering and making sure that those who are responsible are named and condemned so it does not happen again.”

We must not look away, not walk away and never shy away from telling the truth, from naming those responsible and from demanding justice.

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

Mr. Larsen (Australia): We are convening at a time in which the world is experiencing more conflict than at any time since the Second World War — brutal, degrading conflict that is causing widespread destruction. Civilians, and especially women and children, are paying an unacceptable price. As we heard from our briefers yesterday and as reaffirmed by more than 80 Member States yesterday morning, we cannot ignore the backdrop of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The United Nations reports that the entire population of Gaza is at risk of famine. Clearly, not enough is being done to protect civilians. With international partners, Australia calls on Israel to allow a full and immediate resumption of aid to Gaza.

I have three points that we see as critical to strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, we call for strict compliance with international humanitarian law. The year 2024 was the deadliest year on record for humanitarian personnel, with more than 360 deaths across 20 conflict zones. Journalists and media workers were also under attack, with 53 killed in countries affected by armed conflict — an increase of 15 per cent from 2023. Those figures alone tell us that this is unacceptable. Humanitarian personnel, journalists and media workers must be protected in line with international humanitarian law. Direct attacks should be investigated and, where applicable, prosecuted in compliance with national and international law. Australia is leading a ministerial group to develop a declaration on the protection of humanitarian personnel. The declaration will focus on improved adherence to international humanitarian law, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, together with enhanced support for local humanitarian personnel and strengthened accountability for attacks against aid workers. The declaration is being developed in consultation with humanitarian partners and will complement existing efforts, including resolution 2730 (2024). We strongly encourage Member States to join us in that effort. Australia is also pleased to support the global international humanitarian law initiative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), including as co-Chair, with Austria and Kenya, of the workstream on best practices for preventing international humanitarian law violations. And I acknowledge the remarks of ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric Egger delivered yesterday morning.

Secondly, where peace operations have a protection mandate, Australia calls for adequate resourcing and improved capabilities to protect civilians. Protection must be a central focus in all mission components to maintain trust and confidence, especially with local communities. That is particularly important in transition settings, where civilians, including women and girls, are most at risk of violence, including sexual violence and harassment. Importantly, efforts to prevent and resolve conflict cannot be separated from the risks of gender-based violence.

Thirdly, we must be vigilant in fostering a culture of protection not just during armed conflict, but after the fighting has stopped. The protection of civilians should be viewed through a lens of human rights obligations, and we must redouble our efforts to prevent outbreak or escalation. Evidence-based advocacy, monitoring and capacity-building can ensure State and non-State actors have the tools and capabilities to fulfil their protection responsibilities. The Peacebuilding Commission can play an important role in reinforcing a culture of protection focused on the long-term safety and security of civilians through nationally owned peacebuilding and sustainable development efforts.

Australia firmly believes civilians should never be a target, and we must do more to protect them.

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

Mrs. González (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate and allowing non-member States of the Security Council to express their views on the relevant issue of the protection of civilians. We are also grateful for the stake-out initiative undertaken yesterday. We are grateful for the briefings presented by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the Executive Director of UN-Women, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the President and Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

In view of the bleak panorama of global conflicts, Uruguay reaffirms its commitment to the protection of civilians and strict compliance with international

humanitarian law, an essential pillar of the Security Council's agenda and an inescapable legal obligation. The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict for the year 2024 (S/2025/271) reflects a heartbreaking situation, with an alarming increase in civilian casualties, especially women and children. We note the escalation of violence in Gaza, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Myanmar and Ukraine — all situations that call for concrete and coordinated action. Humanitarian personnel must be respected and supported.

The gradual but steady erosion of international humanitarian law threatens to take us back to a world in which brute force trumps agreed principles and norms. We see that in deliberate attacks against civilians, often justified with distorted interpretations of international law. We must demand a strengthening of accountability mechanisms and assume our collective responsibility in the implementation of mandates for the protection of civilians. In that regard, Uruguay reaffirms the 2022 political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas and the need for it to be effectively implemented, for which we encourage restrictive measures, including arms embargoes, to reduce civilian casualties.

As co-Chair of the Working Group on Hospitals in the context of the global initiative on international humanitarian law, Uruguay notes the increasing violence against protected civilians: humanitarian workers, journalists and healthcare workers, as well as numerous incidents against patients and infrastructure recorded by the World Health Organization. Those unacceptable attacks are not only devastating in the short term but undermine the well-being of the population in the long term. We stress that parties to the conflict must guarantee a safe environment to enable healthcare workers to do their work and ensure their access to vulnerable populations. What has happened in Gaza over the past year is unacceptable for the international community and this Organization.

Uruguay reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's recommendations to prevent attacks against humanitarian personnel.

Likewise, almost 10 years after its unanimous adoption, we are concerned that resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of civilians, hospitals and humanitarian personnel in conflict situations, submitted by Uruguay and co-sponsored by 85 States, is not being respected, despite its clear message against these violations and its call for accountability to prevent impunity.

Moreover, United Nations peace missions face challenges in carrying out their civilian protection mandates in the context of multifaceted conflicts involving armed non-State actors, intricate political dynamics and the use of advanced technology by non-State actors. In addition, malicious misinformation spread through social media poses risks to both civilians and our peacekeepers, requiring innovative responses.

We believe that the Council must act decisively. We recognize timely progress in the protection of civilians, but we are alarmed by the growing and dangerous gap between the legal obligations assumed and their implementation on the ground. That gap jeopardizes the gains made in the protection agendas, increasing the vulnerability of civilians. Therefore, in the light of clear violations of international law, we consider that the Council must take strong and impartial measures, ensuring compliance with international law, as impunity promotes the escalation of attacks against civilians and humanitarian actors. In that regard, we call on the Council to explore effective mechanisms, including sanctions and actions before the International Criminal Court, to prevent the recurrence of violations.

Finally, we believe it is critical to strengthen mediation efforts during armed conflict, both through the United Nations and regional mechanisms, always with the full participation of civil society.

Uruguay reiterates its unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians and expresses its willingness to collaborate with other Member States to address existing challenges. We invite one and all to maintain a constructive dialogue, with respect for differences, to achieve consensus that will strengthen the protection of civilians in all conflicts. Uruguay will continue to promote respect for multilateralism and active diplomacy, in the conviction that these are fundamental tools for achieving lasting and just solutions in the area of civilian protection.

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

Mr. Miarka (Poland): I would like to begin by thanking Greece for organizing this important debate and by expressing my appreciation to all the briefers for their remarks.

Poland aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/271) paints a grim picture, in which attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure are no longer collateral damage. They have become an inherent part of military operations. We cannot be — and are not — indifferent to the fate of civilians affected by conflicts, whether in Gaza, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or anywhere else. Effective protection demands a greater focus on persons in vulnerable situations, including children and youth; persons with disabilities and chronic health conditions; and internally displaced persons — as they suffer disproportionately from the consequences of armed conflicts. Yet, attacks against them continue.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has reminded us that children are particularly affected during conflicts. Ukrainian children are being forcibly taken from their parents, deported, brainwashed, illegally adopted and militarized by Russia. In addition to the direct threat to their lives and health and the massive displacement across the country, hundreds of medical and educational facilities have been destroyed or severely damaged by Russian shelling and air strikes. The destruction of hospitals and schools constantly deprives Ukrainians of their right to education and healthcare. The Kremlin must be held accountable. Humanitarian assistance cannot be provided without safe access and safe working conditions. Poland is deeply concerned about the trend of increased attacks on humanitarian workers, medical personnel and journalists. Equally alarming is the rise of disinformation and misinformation campaigns negatively impacting the safety of civilians, including humanitarian personnel. Clear, fact-based communication should be at the centre of any immediate response, while long-term efforts must focus on education, including awareness of the risks arising from the misuse of new technologies.

Compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to armed conflicts, be they State or non-State actors, is not an option, but an obligation. Poland would like to see the Security Council take concrete measures to that end. The international community's unity on unconditional respect for international humanitarian law should be strengthened. The issue of accountability is of paramount importance. Fighting impunity is crucial to ensuring that violations of human rights and international humanitarian law do not go unpunished and to delivering justice to the victims.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that international humanitarian law is one of the greatest achievements of the international community. But it can remain so only if all of us respect its principles, comply with its provisions and ensure accountability for its violations.

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

Mr. Hovhannisyan (Armenia): The delegation of the Republic of Armenia welcomes the convening of the open debate under the presidency of Greece. The presence and intervention of Foreign Minister Gerapetritis underscores the urgency and importance of this issue. We also thank the briefers for their insightful remarks.

Armenia attaches great importance to the promotion of justice and the rule of law in international relations. In that vein, it is crucial to ensure full and unconditional compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional.

Regrettably, armed conflicts are seeing increased targeting of civilian populations and critical infrastructure, enforced disappearances, abductions, the maiming and killing of women, the elderly and other vulnerable groups, as well as the use of starvation as a method of warfare. The conflicts also have a particularly heavy toll on the mental health of children, especially those who are forcibly displaced. Among the emerging challenges are State-orchestrated disinformation and misinformation campaigns using new technologies to justify the use of force. Incitement to hate and xenophobia based on ethnicity and religion creates a sense of impunity and a breeding ground for gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

The inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners of war and civilians, including in our region remains a pressing concern. Reports of persecution, ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and sham trials of prisoners of war, conducted with serious procedural violations, constitute a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The denial of international humanitarian access, including for the International Committee of the Red Cross, the reduction of an international presence and the suppression of voices of free media and independent civil society further complicate efforts to address the protection needs of the affected populations.

The Government of Armenia — in cooperation with the United Nations, other international and regional organizations, Member States and development partners — has undertaken significant steps to respond to the life-saving and early-recovery needs of refugees forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh. Important measures in that regard have been ensuring their social protection and access to healthcare, with a focus on the most vulnerable. Partnerships with UNESCO, UNICEF and other international organizations and partner States have been key in promoting the psychosocial rehabilitation of refugee children and their inclusion in education. Currently, the Government has embarked on addressing the long-term socioeconomic needs of the refugees, including housing and employment.

Against the backdrop of the challenges outlined, we underscore the urgent need for collective action of the international community to advance the full implementation of international humanitarian law, without any political preconditions. Reports by humanitarian workers, independent media and reputable human rights organizations play an important role in helping the United Nations system identify early warning signs of potential risks that, if left unaddressed, can affect civilians and lead to violations of their fundamental human rights. Denial of international humanitarian access, harassment and misinformation campaigns targeting humanitarian workers, media professionals and civil society organizations should be seen as indicators of potential risks of violence and escalation.

The United Nations peacebuilding architecture needs to apply a United Nations system-wide approach to the protection of civilians by reviewing reports and communications from United Nations bodies and mandates responsible for monitoring human rights and humanitarian situations, conducting thorough analysis and bringing to the attention of the Security Council situations that could pose a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Bamya (Palestine): Gaza — the name alone suffices. The images it invokes are daunting, which means that everybody knows the truth. And yet Gaza still bleeds, burns and buries its sons and daughters when it has the luxury of doing so. Israel banned international media so as to prevent the images from reaching the world, but Palestinian journalists and ordinary citizens recorded the crimes. They were sometimes killed for what they documented and sometimes documented their very own deaths. They thought at first that if the images reached the world, it would not allow the genocide to continue. Now the survivors are recording so that the true tale of their massacre survives them.

Today we are talking about the protection of civilians, but which civilians? Does it concern Palestinian civilians? Israel deprived all of them — every single one of them — of protection. In its book, they are all either terrorists or human shields — in its cynical narrative, it promotes that idea. In the first case, they deserve to die; in the second, Israel cannot be blamed for their death. Never mind that it uses one-ton bombs, obliterating entire neighbourhoods. Never mind that it is imposing a blockade on the entire civilian population. Never mind that it is flattening all of Gaza. For 20 months now, daily atrocities have occurred, under our watch and before our very eyes. There is no protection for Palestinian civilians; all protection is for Israeli perpetrators. The whole world chants, weeps and aches for Gaza and is outraged by what is happening there, but the people in Gaza and the children of Gaza have no use for our chants, tears or outrage if they are not accompanied by actions that could actually stop the killing, feed the hungry, heal the wounded and save those who can still be saved.

We demanded the unhindered supply of humanitarian aid to Gaza. We have been demanding it for 20 months. We have been demanding it as Israel has blocked all aid for the past two months. But the only unhindered supply to Gaza are bombs. Everything else is lacking — water, food, shelter, medicine, fuel, cooking gas, flour and hope. The whole world stands with Gaza, and yet Gaza stands alone. All that solidarity from across the globe, and yet we cannot help a father begging for help as his child is burning before his eyes, as he sees his skin melting and can only watch him as he shouts in pain. Flames and hunger are devouring Palestinian children. And we all agree that it is shameful, unbearable and unacceptable. Leaders are using words that they have never used, considering decisions that are unprecedented. But much more is needed to break the siege and save the people. Much more is needed, and we are already very late.

What are we going to say? That the whole world was opposed to mass indiscriminate killing, but it continued anyway? The whole world was opposed to wanton destruction but waited until all of Gaza was flattened? The whole world was outraged by the use of starvation as a method of war and the declared blockade but could not lift it? That it is ultimately for Israel to decide who lives and who dies? If that is our plan, God have mercy on the 2 million people in Gaza. How come none of us can stop the bombs decimating families and destroying communities? How come we cannot stop the snipers' bullets before they are lodged in a little girl's head? How come we cannot get painkillers to a child having a limb amputated or bring in milk to feed a starving child or a loaf of bread to save a life? How come we still cannot? We should never believe the tale of our own powerlessness, never believe that we are powerless. We cannot leave 2 million people to their fate, saying that we tried and failed, because that means they are doomed. We fought for 20 months against the dehumanization of Palestinians that made their mass killing acceptable. But we must warn now against relying on Palestinian heroism, as seeing them as heroes might mean that we forget that they are humans. They are bleeding, exhausted and shattered, and they are victims. We failed the dead — let us not fail the survivors.

One million children in Gaza will need several lives to recover from what they have witnessed and endured, but they can still be alive tomorrow if we act today. Once the world has recognized the genocide, it cannot continue to watch it unfold. We cannot wait, resign ourselves or surrender. We must dare to do what is necessary to end the genocide and break the siege. Maybe then we can save the survivors, save Gaza and save the children of Gaza, so that we may all be saved by Gaza.

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

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece for presiding over this important meeting, and I would like to thank the delegation of Greece for its valued efforts during its presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank all the briefers for their valuable contributions.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a fundamental pillar of the work of the Security Council and an established commitment under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. However, civilians, including women and children, continue to suffer the impact of armed conflict. As more than 120 armed conflicts continue to rage, the spread of new technologies and the blatant violations and lenient interpretations of international humanitarian law are causing massive human losses, as the Secretary-General highlighted in his most recent report (S/2025/271). In that context, the Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its steadfast position on the need to protect civilians and civilian objects, ensure the safety of healthcare and humanitarian workers and allow for the full, rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid.

Amid the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates the need for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, as well as the need to release all hostages and detainees and ensure unimpeded humanitarian access. Any long-term settlement of the situation in Gaza must focus on reconstruction without the forced displacement of the civilian population and the establishment of an effective governance framework that ensures security and stability in Gaza.

During its presidency of the thirty-third Arab Summit, the Kingdom of Bahrain conveyed a message of peace to the world. It focused on alleviating the suffering of the most affected groups in conflicts and those deprived of basic rights. The Kingdom of Bahrain proposed several initiatives at the Summit aimed at creating a safe and stable environment for all peoples of the Middle East. It also advocated for launching a recovery phase for the region, with initiatives that included providing educational and healthcare services to those affected by conflicts in the region and enhancing pan-Arab cooperation in the fields of financial technology and digital transformation. The Kingdom of Bahrain remains committed to following up on the implementation of those initiatives through pan-Arab cooperation mechanisms and international partnerships.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain emphasizes the need for the international community to uphold its legal, humanitarian and moral responsibility to protect innocent lives. It also asserts the need to achieve sustainable peace as the most effective means of protecting civilians and preventing violations through collective action and respect for human dignity, thereby paving the way for a more peaceful and just future.

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

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Greece for organizing this debate and all the briefers for their magnificent insights yesterday.

Last year, at this same meeting, we should have been celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and 25 years of the protection of civilians

on the Security Council's agenda, but our voices conveyed concern, frustration and profound apprehension (see S/PV.9632). Unfortunately, the developments since then have confirmed the fear that our calls would go unheeded.

In 1945, in San Francisco, and in 1949, in Geneva, our predecessors established the foundations of a legal and moral order aimed at preventing the scourge of war. Those foundations appear to be crumbling. We are witnessing international humanitarian law being outright ignored and often instrumentalized. That includes overly permissive interpretations and neglect for precaution and proportionality, to whitewash violations thereof. Beyond their atrocious human costs, those violations undermine trust, political dialogue and conditions for peace.

We must ensure that we all abide always by our obligations under international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian protection must be guaranteed to all. No military objective and no historical grievance nor political aim can ever justify the deliberate targeting of civilians. Widespread attacks on any civilians, humanitarian personnel, healthcare workers and journalists — as has been documented in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere — are abhorrent and unacceptable.

Advocacy is key to promote universal compliance with the rules of international humanitarian law. That is why, last year, Brazil, together with China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Africa and the International Committee of the Red Cross, launched the global initiative on international humanitarian law. We also joined Australia, Colombia, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom in a ministerial group dedicated to championing international humanitarian law and the protection of humanitarian workers. We invite all Member States to join in those efforts.

The adoption of resolution 2730 (2024) reaffirmed the international community's commitment to the protection of humanitarian and United Nations personnel. That landmark resolution responds to findings in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/271), which recorded tens of thousands of civilian deaths and more than 360 deaths of humanitarian workers in 2024, the overwhelming majority of which, in both cases, in Gaza alone.

Perhaps most importantly, we must act in conformity with the general prohibition on the use of force in the Charter of the United Nations. We must always seek a peaceful settlement of our disputes, through instruments such as those referred to in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations.

Furthermore, it is essential not to neglect post-conflict needs. Greece was right in proposing a question on how the peacebuilding architecture can enhance the protection of civilians. Strengthening the peacebuilding architecture — as we are committed to doing this year — can bring direct benefits to countries in post-conflict or in transition. The Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund, if adequately equipped and financed, can better assist communities and promote locally led projects, as requested by national Governments, thereby making societies more resilient.

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

Mr. Vasconcelos y Cruz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico is grateful to Greece for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians.

Mexico expresses its deep dismay about the trends that reflect a worsening of human suffering in multiple contexts of armed conflict in today's world. We are witnessing a growing dissonance between the obligations of States and other actors under international law and the reality faced by people in contemporary conflicts. Deliberate attacks against civilians, the indiscriminate destruction of essential

infrastructure, the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, forced displacement and deliberate restrictions on humanitarian assistance, the use of famine as collective punishment, are practices that contravene the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and the very purposes of the United Nations.

Mexico refers to the recent statements by the Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Tom Fletcher, on the risk that 14,000 children could die in the next hours of hunger if humanitarian aid is not allowed into Gaza. Mexico reiterates its urgent call for the entry of humanitarian assistance, without restrictions or conditions, to alleviate the severe situation being experienced by the civilian population in Gaza. The work of United Nations humanitarian agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations is critical to mitigating the effects of conflict on civilian populations.

We take the opportunity of this debate to honour the 377 humanitarian workers who were killed, in 20 countries, in 2024, the deadliest year for humanitarian workers.

Mexico also underscores that accountability for violations of international law is essential to break cycles of impunity and to prevent future atrocities. In that regard, we reiterate our support for international mechanisms whose purpose is to obtain justice, including the International Criminal Court, which is a fundamental instrument to punish the most serious crimes affecting the international community.

Furthermore, we stress the importance of harmonizing prevention and protection obligations in national legal frameworks to ensure a consistent and sustained application of international humanitarian law. In line with that commitment, Mexico has joined the global initiative to galvanize political commitment to international humanitarian law.

We consider it necessary to strengthen preventive actions that protect civilians in armed conflicts, and we therefore call on Member States to, first, join the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas; secondly, protect humanitarian workers and medical personnel, including by establishing humanitarian corridors and mechanisms to facilitate unrestricted access to populations in need; and thirdly, request the Secretary-General, through the Security Council, his representatives and special envoys, as well as peacekeeping operations and special political missions, to review possible violations of international humanitarian law in today's very serious conflicts.

As has been repeatedly stated, strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights is central to the protection of civilians. But that approach must be complemented by concrete actions aimed at prevention, protection and accountability in a coherent and coordinated manner by the entire international community.

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

Mr. Beleffi (San Marino): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important briefing and the briefers for their remarks.

The situation outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2025/271) is deeply alarming. It clearly shows, once again, that civilians bear the brunt of armed conflict worldwide. The death toll of civilians trapped in conflict, including children and women, has reached a shocking number. We cannot remain silent in the face of such a tragedy. Civilians continue to suffer immensely. They have been targeted, killed, injured, kidnapped and tortured. The number of civilians displaced has reached new records. Civilians have been deprived of water, food and humanitarian assistance. Houses, critical infrastructure, schools and hospitals have been targeted and destroyed or damaged, leaving civilians in despair, children without education

and patients without healthcare. Extensive use of explosive weapons in populated areas have caused the majority of civilian casualties in various conflicts. San Marino condemns such attacks and calls on all States to support 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.

Regretfully, violence has also increased against humanitarian actors and journalists. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, 2024 was the deadliest year on record for aid workers. We firmly condemn such acts of violence, and we recall the importance of implementing resolution 2730 (2024), which San Marino also co-sponsored, and which calls on all States to respect and protect United Nations and humanitarian personnel in accordance with their obligations under international law.

San Marino is deeply worried for the increasing disregard for international law. We are all responsible for ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. The international community must act with urgency in order to stop the flagrant targeting of civilians, humanitarian workers and journalists in armed conflicts. It is necessary to stop the widespread impunity for violations of international humanitarian law. Strengthening accountability for violations seems to be a critical factor if we truly want to prevent future violations.

Finally, the Secretary-General's report warns us about the risks related to new technologies. Artificial intelligence has been used in conflict to select targets and make life-or-death decisions. That is a very worrisome trend. San Marino believes that meaningful human control must be retained over such decisions, guided by international law and ethical principles. It is therefore urgent to negotiate a legally binding instrument to establish clear prohibitions and restrictions on autonomous weapons systems.

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

Mr. Tun (Myanmar): At the outset, I would like to thank Greece's presidency for convening this important open debate, and the briefers for presenting the alarming global situation on the protection of civilians.

I also extend my profound gratitude to the Secretary-General for his latest report on the protection of civilians (S/2025/271). The report vividly captures serious violations of international humanitarian law across regions and highlights devastating consequences for innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as for personnel discharging their duties to protect the civilians in harm's way.

Sadly, the number of people killed or suffering is growing every day. Clearly, the international community must redouble its efforts to protect civilians. As a country concerned, Myanmar thanks the Secretary-General for highlighting, in his report, the dire situation in Myanmar and the immense suffering of its civilians.

Today Myanmar stands as a bleak example of emerging threats to civilians and those who seek to help them. As the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in 2024 (S/2024/385) noted, the last quarter of 2023 saw Myanmar's conflict escalate sharply — with intensified air strikes, artillery shelling and even villages burned, including in urban areas previously spared. Tragically, as illustrated in this year's report, that violence has only grown worse through 2024 and into 2025.

On a daily basis, people in Myanmar live in fear due to the military junta's egregious atrocities ranging from killing, arbitrary arrests, forced conscription, sexual violence, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions to aerial attacks. Since the coup began in February 2021, more than 6,700 civilians have been killed. That is the verified number; the actual number is undoubtedly higher.

Under such circumstances, women, children, persons with disability and older persons have become exceptionally vulnerable, bearing the heaviest brunt

of the junta's brutalities. Yet the military junta has never agreed to the cessation of hostilities, instead continuing its campaign of terror against the civilians in a blatant manner.

On 28 March, Myanmar was struck by a devastating earthquake that measured 7.7 on the Richter scale. It claimed nearly 3,800 lives, destroyed homes, schools, and critical infrastructure, and left thousands more injured or displaced. In the face of this national tragedy — when unity, compassion and relief were most urgently needed — in many areas, the military junta chose not to provide aid, but to exploit the chaos. It launched fresh air strikes on quake-hit areas, cynically using the disaster as cover to murder more Myanmar people — a horror that the United Nations has rightly called “completely outrageous and unacceptable”.

In just one five-day period, from 10 to 15 May 2025, junta air raids across multiple regions killed 80 people and injured 185. Among the victims were children at school. On 12 May, a village school in Depayin, Sagaing region, was hit, killing at least 20 children, along with their teachers. Such atrocities underscore the military junta's utter disregard for human life.

The junta uses humanitarian suffering as a weapon of war. It imposes blockades and restrictions that prevent life-saving aid from reaching those in need. Even after Cyclone Mocha in 2023 and this year's earthquake, the military has repeated its cruel pattern of obstructing relief. This calculated denial of assistance is worsening an already dire humanitarian crisis. Today 20 million people in Myanmar are in need of aid. More than 3.5 million people are being displaced. Yet aid workers are risking their lives to deliver help in the face of junta impediments.

Humanitarian personnel, as well as journalists and media professionals, are not spared from attacks. The military junta has created a climate of terror for those who dare to report the truth or render aid. Aid workers and medics have been arrested, tortured or even killed for doing their jobs — more than 130 health workers have been murdered since the coup, and more than 330 medical facilities have been destroyed.

Journalists face intimidation, imprisonment and lethal violence. The junta seeks to silence witnesses who could report on its crimes by jailing reporters and even taking their lives. We salute the courage of Myanmar's local humanitarian volunteers and independent journalists who persist in the face of those threats.

The Security Council itself has explicitly condemned the military junta's atrocities in resolution 2669 (2022). Yet the junta's brutality continues unabated. The United Nations and the Security Council must be bold if they are to successfully protect civilians.

We therefore echo the Secretary-General's call: there must be accountability for those who wage war on civilians. The junta and its leaders must not be permitted to act with impunity. We ask the Security Council and all Member States to take decisive action. The Council should demand an immediate halt to the aerial bombings and atrocities, and insist on unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need. Any actors providing the junta with weapons, jet fuel or legitimacy should be urged to end such support, for they are fuelling the slaughter of innocents. I wish to stress that a comprehensive approach to resolving Myanmar's issue clearly lies in addressing the root causes and ending the military dictatorship and unlawful military coup. At the same time, we ask Member States to increase humanitarian aid through local civil society networks, and we call on all countries to offer refuge and protection to those fleeing violence, including journalists, aid workers and activists targeted by the junta.

Above all, despite their unimaginable suffering, the people of Myanmar have not given up hope. Our resolve to achieve peace, democracy and federal unity remains strong. We continue to demand the future we voted for and deserve — a federal,

democratic Myanmar that protects the rights and safety of all its people. Myanmar's people remain steadfast in that vision. We are committed to building a nation founded on human rights, justice and the rule of law, where the military's assaults on civilians become a nightmare of the past. I respectfully ask the Council to not allow Myanmar to become a forgotten crisis. The courage and sacrifices of Myanmar's civilians, humanitarian workers and journalists merit not just our admiration but our concrete action. Please act now with unity and conviction to end the junta's reign of terror and ensure that the protection of civilians is not merely an agenda item but a reality on the ground in Myanmar.

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

Mrs. Narváez Ojeda (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Chile thanks Greece for organizing this meeting.

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), the Security Council has adopted various resolutions that address the protection of civilians in armed conflict and respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law. However, despite the legal commitments that have been achieved, we note with extreme concern the failure to conform with those regulations, including the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Protocols Additional — the backbone of the enshrined commitments. The persistence and worsening of armed conflicts over the past few years have been disconcerting, resulting in devastating consequences for the civilian population, with thousands of deaths that attest to that. In 2024 alone, the United Nations recorded more than 36,000 civilian deaths in various conflicts. In that regard, Chile categorically condemns all attacks against critical civilian infrastructure and goods and services that are essential to civilian life, including schools, hospitals, water and energy systems and centres for storing and distributing food. Such action contravenes international humanitarian law, aggravates the suffering of the most vulnerable and undermines the basis for sustainable peace.

During this week of awareness-raising about the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has informed us that Gaza is facing the worst humanitarian crisis since the hostilities began. Today the civilian population in Gaza is at risk of famine, without timely access to humanitarian assistance and in a situation where hundreds of humanitarian workers have lost their lives during the conflict. We reiterate our firm condemnation of the attack carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023. We believe that attacks against civilians are unacceptable under any circumstances and must be investigated and punished in line with international law. We express our profound concern about, and rejection of, the recent military operations conducted in the Gaza Strip, the scale and intensity of which have exacerbated the already devastating humanitarian crisis. The disproportionate use of force, the bombing in densely populated areas and the restrictions on humanitarian assistance have incurred an unacceptable human cost. Particularly alarming is the situation of Palestinian civilians, in particular children and women, who are facing forced displacement, hunger and a lack of access to basic medical services.

In that context, Chile urgently calls for strict adherence to international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in military operations. The protection of civilians is not an option, but rather a legal and moral obligation. In line with that principle, Chile has actively participated in the work of the International Court of Justice. It is worth noting that, among other steps, Chile has submitted its declaration of intervention in the case Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), thereby reaffirming our common duty to prevent and sanction that crime. Chile also took part in the oral phase of the advisory opinion requested by the General Assembly on the situation

in the occupied Palestinian territory (see A/78/968), when it underscored the obligation to facilitate humanitarian assistance and respect for humanitarian law. In that same spirit, we paid tribute to the work of humanitarian workers, who, in extremely adverse circumstances, assist victims of armed conflict. In particular, we highlight the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose work is essential for the survival and dignity of the Palestinian population.

Lastly, Chile wants to reiterate that the protection of civilians is the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, and it is the duty of all parties to ensure its implementation. In that regard, only an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza can ensure the appropriate protection of Palestinian civilians.

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

Mr. Kabaev (Kyrgyzstan): At the outset, we commend the Greek presidency for convening today's important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We extend our appreciation to all those high-level representatives who have travelled from their capitals to participate in this vital discussion. We also express our gratitude to the team of the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for preparing the comprehensive report (S/2025/271) and all the briefers for the information they provided on today's topic.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict remains one of the fundamental pillars of international humanitarian law. Despite an established legal framework, we continue to witness significant harm being caused to civilians. Too often in today's conflicts, international humanitarian law is violated with impunity. Civilian infrastructure is deliberately targeted, populations are forcibly displaced, ethnic cleansing is committed, and civilians are used as weapons of war. That alarming reality underscores the urgent need for shared responsibility, unwavering solidarity and genuine political will. The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Protocols Additional must not remain symbolic documents. They must be upheld, implemented and enforced.

The protection of civilians can only be effective when a comprehensive approach is applied — one that combines legal enforcement, humanitarian action, disciplined and responsible military conduct and meaningful international cooperation. All parties should unite in pursuit of a single goal — the safety and dignity of civilians, particularly the most vulnerable, namely, women and children. Preventing conflict escalation demands proactive diplomacy. We must invest in early mediation, create platforms for dialogue and empower United Nations and other regional organizations to act swiftly and effectively. The international community must intensify its collective efforts to end the bloodshed in Gaza, prevent any further loss of innocent lives and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. Nowadays, armed conflicts are increasingly shaped by information and communications technology and artificial intelligence. Those developments demand an interdisciplinary approach combining humanitarian, legal, digital and psychological dimensions to protect civilians effectively.

Kyrgyzstan has both contributed to and learned from efforts to protect civilians. Since the 1990s, we have actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Today most Kyrgyz peacekeepers are serving in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, where they continue to demonstrate professionalism, discipline and dedication to the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, our own experience with inter-ethnic and border-related conflicts has shaped our robust national mechanisms in protecting civilians in conflict. Those include rapid evacuation protocols, coordinated humanitarian response and local tension-reduction initiatives involving civil society and community dialogue. Special emphasis has been placed on training Government agencies to

prevent violence against women and children, those most at risk in conflict, through simulation exercises and inter-agency coordination seminars.

Let me draw the Council's attention to the other part of the world, Central Asia. Our commitment to preventive diplomacy has produced concrete results. Just two months ago, after intense but constructive negotiations, we successfully resolved a long-standing and complex border dispute with our neighbouring countries. That border dispute had been one of the root causes of conflicts. Through a mutual agreement, which was signed in March, on the delimitation of State borders, Central Asian countries have laid the groundwork for sustainable peace, stability and regional cooperation. That historic achievement stands as a unique example of what can be accomplished through the political will of leaders, diplomacy and mutual respect. It affirms our belief that even the most entrenched disputes can be resolved through preventive diplomacy and direct dialogue.

In conclusion, we affirm our strong commitment to promoting global peace, security and humanitarian principles. Above all, we urge all parties of today's conflicts to act with responsibility and humanity to maintain constructive dialogue and to redouble diplomatic efforts to alleviate the suffering of civilians caught in the horrors of armed conflicts.

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

Mr. Thapa (Nepal): At the outset, I thank the presidency of Greece for convening today's open debate on this very timely and pertinent theme. I also thank the briefers for their insightful and comprehensive remarks yesterday.

It is deeply troubling that, across the globe, civilians continue to suffer greatly from the indiscriminate effects of armed conflicts. Civilian deaths, including an alarming proportion of women and children, make up a significant portion of casualties in conflicts. More often than not, civilians are intentionally attacked, used as human shields and subjected to violence as a war tactic. Deliberate attacks on civilians, including unlawful killings, abductions and forced disappearances, are on the rise.

Beyond direct violence, armed conflicts trigger civilian deaths and suffering through the destruction of infrastructure, prolonged instability, social unrest and economic collapse. Similarly, to our utmost consternation, humanitarian personnel and workers, journalists and media professionals are facing growing risks, including targeted violence and restricted access to conflict zones. There has been a sharp increase in the number of journalists and media workers being killed in conflict zones over the years.

Furthermore, the fact that more than 260 on-duty United Nations personnel, including five peacekeepers, lost their lives in 2024 alone speaks volumes about that grave situation and raises concerns about their safety and security.

Emerging threats in armed conflict pose significant challenges to civilian protection. As armed conflicts become more complex, sophisticated and protracted, ensuring accountability for the flagrant and repeated violations of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, is becoming increasingly challenging.

The use of indiscriminate warfare and the possible abuse of new technologies, including artificial intelligence, for misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and their spread have presented further challenges to the protection of civilians.

In addition, current geopolitical rivalries have exacerbated the overall peace and security architecture, negatively impacting the protection of civilians in conflict situations.

Nepal strongly condemns the indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including humanitarian workers, United Nations personnel and media professionals, as well as on civilian infrastructure, by all parties in conflict. Those who perpetrate and condone such indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks should be held accountable as per the law.

We strongly call on all parties to conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights law and ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian efforts.

Although the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host State, the United Nations and humanitarian agencies should support States that lack the capacity to do so.

Effective protection requires a holistic approach, integrating political solutions, prevention and peacebuilding strategies, humanitarian support, peacekeeping operations and active community engagement.

I wish to inform that Nepal, currently the largest contributor of troops and police, deploys professional peacekeepers who are well versed in the concept and execution of the protection of civilians mandate.

We also underline the need to address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, exclusion and violations of human rights, while reiterating that preventing or ending conflicts is the ultimate protection of civilians.

Similarly, concerted efforts should be made to curb the misuse of new technologies, including misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and their spread, to ensure the safety of civilians, humanitarian and United Nations personnel, journalists and media professionals in conflicts.

In conclusion, protecting civilians and preventing conflict must remain a global priority. Indeed, it is our shared responsibility. Let us advocate for peace, commit to peacebuilding, enforce humanitarian law and support those in need of protection.

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

Mrs. Jabou Bessadok (Tunisia): Tunisia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Arab States and thanks Greece for convening this important debate.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a binding obligation under international humanitarian law. Yet we continue to witness shocking disregard for that obligation. Across many conflict zones civilians are targeted, starved, displaced and denied the most basic protections.

Nowhere is that reality more devastating than in Gaza, where more than 52,000 Palestinians have been killed and entire neighbourhoods erased. Humanitarian access remains blocked, and essential services are collapsing. Tunisia calls for an immediate ceasefire, the lifting of the blockade and full respect for international humanitarian law.

We also condemn the alarming increase in attacks on humanitarian workers, United Nations personnel and medical teams. That trend must be reversed. Safe, unimpeded humanitarian access is a legal right that must be guaranteed.

Tunisia is deeply committed to the safety of journalists and the fight against impunity. As a core sponsor of General Assembly resolution 76/173 on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, we reaffirm that protecting media professionals, including women journalists facing gender-based threats, is essential to preserving truth and transparency during conflict.

Accountability must be at the centre of our collective efforts. Violations of international humanitarian law and human rights must be investigated, and perpetrators held responsible. Impunity fuels recurrence. Justice must prevail.

Behind every statistic are lives cut short, families shattered and futures lost. Tunisia renews its commitment to uphold the dignity, safety and rights of all civilians affected by conflict and to support every effort that brings us closer to peace, protection and accountability.

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

Mr. Jancke (Germany): Germany fully aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and the Group of Friends on Action on Conflict and Hunger.

At the outset, I would like to commend all peacekeepers and all humanitarian workers who dedicate their efforts — and, too often, their lives — to the protection of civilians. Their work is crucial to ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations.

Last week, more than 140 delegations gathered in Berlin for the United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial. While a multitude of issues were discussed, a key consensus was the need for more prioritized, efficient and focused mandates, with the protection of civilians at their core.

However, the protection of civilians remains a very challenging and often impossible mandate. The reason for this is conflict parties that blatantly ignore their obligations. That behaviour is unacceptable and has to be clearly denounced by the Security Council. Likewise, it is the Council's responsibility to actively engage with all actors to a conflict, be they internal or external, with a view to de-escalating tensions.

The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of Governments. At the same time, we must ensure that close cooperation between a mission and its host country on the protection of civilians is established and maintained. In addition, missions need to be adequately staffed, equipped and enabled to deliver on the protection-of-civilians mandate. That also includes the ability to effectively interact with local communities.

As a final thought, allow me to flag a rising phenomenon — the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, fuelled by technological advances. Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech endanger vulnerable communities, obstruct humanitarian action and undermine peacekeeping efforts. Mission leadership regularly points to this as one of the most critical challenges to effective mandate implementation. In order to advance our shared cause for the protection-of-civilians agenda, we have to initiate a much-needed conversation on how to advance information integrity. In addition to clear mandates, we believe that requires adequate staffing and funding. Without investments in the system, we will not achieve that objective.

In conclusion, Germany reiterates its call for the universal and equal application of international law and international humanitarian law in all conflict settings. All parties to a conflict have a legal obligation to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. It is our shared responsibility to ensure that all actors abide by those principles.

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

Mr. Parvathaneni (India): At the outset, let me thank you, Mr. President, for convening this annual open debate today on the important theme of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The world is witnessing a surge in armed conflict, and civilians continue to be victims of such conflicts. It is highly alarming to see that in 2024, according to International Committee of the Red Cross records, the number of victims affected by armed conflict has increased, with 56,000 registered cases of missing persons alone. It is a paramount responsibility of national Governments to create an environment conducive to civilians' safety and security. While we acknowledge the responsibility of Government in today's debate on the protection of civilians, we should not ignore the adverse impacts of all forms of terrorism, including those emanating from across borders. Needless to say, terror entities have significantly enhanced their capabilities through access to new and emerging technologies, which represent new threats, particularly to civilian populations.

In that regard, the efforts of the Council and the international community should be directed at assisting national authorities in developing capabilities and capacities to protect civilians. It is unfortunate that parties to armed conflicts continue to attack civilian populations, particularly women, children and other vulnerable groups, as well as indispensable civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, by projecting them as legitimate targets. Regrettably, during armed conflicts, civilians, including women and children, are used as human shields for military operations and terrorist activities. Therefore, it is paramount that the international community resolve to take concrete actions towards the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Any attack on civilians and humanitarian workers is a grave violation of international law, in particular international humanitarian law. The existing legal framework concerning the protection of civilians cannot be overlooked. Respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States, should remain the basis for all actions taken by the Council for the protection of civilians. A politically motivated decision to intervene in an armed conflict situation may have devastating consequences, including for the civilian population, and must therefore be prevented.

Furthermore, any intervention must be proportionate and based on credible and verified threat perception. The Council and the international community must take the necessary measures to ensure the effective and timely protection of civilians, including their life, dignity and rights. The core principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence must continue to guide the operations of all humanitarian agencies and organizations.

I am compelled to respond to the baseless allegations of the representative of Pakistan on a number of issues.

First, India has experienced decades of Pakistani-sponsored terrorist attacks across borders, ranging from the horrific 26 November attack on the city of Mumbai to the barbaric mass murder of innocent tourists in Pahalgam in April 2025. The victims of Pakistani terrorism have been predominantly civilians, since its objective has been to attack our prosperity, our progress and our morale. For such a nation to even participate in a discussion on the protection of civilians is an affront to the international community.

Secondly, Pakistan has repeatedly used civilian cover to advance the cause of terrorism. We just recently saw senior Government police and military officials pay their respects at the funeral of noted terrorists targeted by Operation Sindoor. A nation that makes no distinction between terrorists and civilians has no credentials to speak about protecting civilians.

Thirdly, earlier this month, the Pakistani army deliberately shelled our border villages, killing more than 20 civilians and injuring more than 80. Places of worship, including gurudwaras, temples and convents, as well as medical facilities, were intentionally targeted. To preach at this organ after such behaviour is grossly

hypocritical. Let us be clear, the protection of civilians should not serve as an argument for the protection of United Nations-designated terrorists. The international community must come together on zero tolerance for terrorism and calling out those who sponsor and defend it.

In conclusion, my delegation reaffirms its commitment to working in close cooperation with the international community to alleviate the suffering of civilians affected by armed conflict.

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

Mr. Pereira Sosa (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Republic of Paraguay is grateful for the opportunity to take the floor and congratulates Greece, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, on holding this meeting. The issue before us is undoubtedly one of particular importance.

I must begin by stating that all parties to an armed conflict have the obligation to respect international law, regardless of whether it is of a State or non-State nature. The state of war or the existence of internal or international armed conflicts is never an excuse for the violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Moreover, the future of parties to conflict depends on the lives of those segments of their population that are not part of the armed conflict taking place around them.

Currently, some thirty active armed confrontations are on the agenda of the Organization and others regional organizations, not counting those known as new threats, in particular the fight against transnational organized crime. That is, by all accounts, alarming. In that regard, the preservation of human life must always be a priority. The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is the responsibility of all parties to conflict according to the obligations established by international humanitarian law. Within the Organization, we have made lofty commitments, starting with those that we must honour fully and that we reaffirmed at the Summit of the Future.

Peace is not something immediate, but rather it is a process that is achieved by solving those causes that led us to conflict. We underline that it is a constant concern for the international community that, clearly, in the context of an armed conflict, the more damage is caused to the civilian population and civilian infrastructure — especially to a country's critical infrastructure — the more difficult it will be to achieve sustainable peace processes.

We emphasize that it is true that women and girls suffer a greater impact in conflict situations, but it is equally true that they are the ones who can represent a bridge to peace. For that reason, we must highlight, recognize and institutionalize their equal and active participation in peace processes, particularly through norms that guarantee that participation, while protecting their human rights, including unrestricted respect for international humanitarian law. As a founding member of the Organization, Paraguay fully understands that all States have a role to play in achieving the objectives of development, peace and security and the guarantee of human rights in the world.

This year marks the eightieth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations, which aimed to spare future generations from the scourge of war. We want to achieve peace, and we will therefore continue to support peacekeeping work, through our service on the Latin American and Caribbean conference on United Nations peacekeeping operations and the Disarmament Commission — both chaired by Paraguay — the Peacebuilding Commission, which we will join next year, and the Security Council itself, with which we aspire to collaborate as an elected member from 2028, hoping to be able to rely on the confidence of the international community.

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

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting to highlight the urgent need to protect civilians in different conflicts and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

The conflict in Yemen has been going on for more than a decade, following the terrorist Houthi militias' coup against the constitutional legitimacy, national consensus and aspirations of the Yemeni people. The militias continue to reject all initiatives for a political solution and undermine all regional and international efforts — including those of the United Nations — aimed at achieving a just and sustainable peace in Yemen based on the principle of a political solution, especially resolution 2216 (2015).

For a decade now, the militias have escalated violations of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. There is no crime that the Houthi militias have not committed against Yemeni civilians — including targeting civilian objects with ballistic missiles, drones and other heavy weaponry — leaving thousands dead and wounded, mostly women and children. They also forced more than 4 million people into internal displacement camps in extremely harsh conditions. The militias then targeted those camps, forcing civilians to flee again. They use starvation as a means of warfare by besieging cities and villages, denying civilians access to water and food, destroying schools, hospitals and places of worship. They also persisted in recruiting children into so-called “summer camps”, brainwashing them with ideas of hatred and extremism before casting them onto the front line.

The militias therefore continue to use humanitarian suffering as a means of achieving political and military gains, undermining an effective humanitarian response. They also continue to abduct humanitarian workers, detaining them in inhumane conditions, resulting in the recent death of a World Food Programme staff member in their prisons. They also resort to systematically imposing restrictions on humanitarian operations, putting obstacles in their way and diverting humanitarian aid away from those who deserve it. As a result, the most vulnerable groups do not have access to that aid. Acute food insecurity and malnutrition rates are also on the rise — especially among women, children and the elderly — amid a serious funding crisis and deteriorating economic conditions.

The continuation and escalation of those violations provide conclusive evidence that the Houthi militias will not renounce their identity as those who kill, destroy and exacerbate humanitarian crises, especially in the light of the continued silence on the part of international community. International human rights organizations are also unable to provide the necessary support and assistance to fulfil their duties to protect civilians. They must take concrete measures to put an end to the violations and crimes against humanity. The international community must adopt a firmer and more serious stance against the violations, including through the designation of these terrorist militias and their leaders on sanctions lists.

The past year has been one of the most difficult for humanitarian workers, journalists, media professionals and political activists. We have witnessed a dangerous escalation in the repression carried out by the Houthi militias, which have abducted and detained dozens of male and female staff members working for United Nations agencies and international organizations operating in Yemen, as well as civil society employees. They have plundered their property, intimidated their families, forcibly disappeared them and refused to disclose their fate until now. They even levelled false charges against them, issuing unfair rulings through the militias' illegal judicial bodies. I repeat that women and children have not been spared from such violations.

Those are not isolated acts, but rather they come as part of a systematic policy of the repressive militias in their attempts to settle scores with their opponents, silence their voices, suppress the freedom of opinion and expression and terrorize politicians, journalists, activists and representatives of civil society in the areas under their control. In that way, they prevent people from expressing their opinions, denouncing the current situation or demanding their rights to live in freedom and dignity. In that context, we reaffirm how important it is for the international community and the United Nations, including the Council, to act to protect the lives of humanitarian workers in the areas controlled by the Houthi militias, take strict measures to stop their violations, pressuring them to immediately and unconditionally release all abductees and detainees.

The planting of mines, including anti-personnel mines, is one of the most serious threats to the lives and safety of civilians in conflict zones in Yemen. My country signed the Ottawa Treaty in 1997 and disposed of its stockpile of this weapon. However, the Houthi militias reverted to manufacturing mines and other explosive devices and spreading them in many areas that are, or were, under their control. That has led, and continues to lead, to the killing and injury of thousands of civilians, especially women and children. The mines cripple the movement of civilians between towns and villages, posing a threat to the lives of millions of civilians and displaced people, who are stuck between a rock and a hard place, with the Houthi bombardments targeting their cities and camps on one side and the mines scattered in their villages, streets, farms, fields and pastureland, which constitute their livelihoods, on the other. Despite the great efforts made at the national level in mine action and the help of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre through the Masam Project to remove landmines, without maps that allow us to determine their location and owing to their density, the mines constitute a significant challenge to those efforts and a real threat for civilians and future generations. In that regard, we call once again on the international community and the United Nations to support the efforts made by the Yemeni Government and the relevant entities to put an end to the tragedies and consequences caused by the spread of mines and explosive devices deployed by the Houthi militias. We call for, in particular, concrete measures to put them under pressure to provide all the landmine maps without delay.

As the war goes on, thousands of civilians continue to fall victim. That is because the Iranian regime continues to provide military, financial and media support to the Houthi militias that attack civilians and civilian objects, in a clear violation of Security Council resolutions on the targeted arms embargo, mainly resolution 2216 (2015), leading to the protraction of the conflict and further suffering for the Yemeni people, and undermining the international community's efforts to maintain regional and international peace and security.

The Security Council must, therefore, implement its resolutions and take a decisive stand aimed at deterring and holding to account those that violate them and preventing the arms smuggling that prolongs the conflict, exacerbates the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and leads to the killing of innocent Yemeni people on a daily basis. The Yemeni people have suffered a long decade of those violations, which are growing in number, committed by the Houthi militias. Their perpetrators enjoy complete impunity, and the international community remains silent despite their activities and violations.

Therefore, Yemenis today are saying that it is time to take serious action, to put an end to those practices and violations and hold perpetrators accountable. It is time for the Yemeni people to regain their freedom, security and sovereignty.

We strongly denounce the Israeli occupation forces' military escalation in both the north and south of the Gaza Strip. The occupation of large swathes of Gaza

continues, intentionally undermining regional and international efforts to end the war and preventing peace and stability in the region.

We denounce the ground operations organized by the Israeli occupation, which directly threaten the lives of Palestinian civilians, exacerbating the humanitarian suffering of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. The catastrophic humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is no longer acceptable.

We support in that regard the call made by our sisterly country, Algeria, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, asking the Security Council to adopt a resolution on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. The Council should not remain silent and must shoulder its full legal, human and moral responsibilities and take urgent action to put an end to the aggression against the Gaza Strip and to provide the Palestinian people with the necessary protection.

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

Mr. Vegas Torres (Peru): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the following members of the Global Alliance for the Missing: Azerbaijan, Colombia, Croatia, Estonia, Kuwait, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, the Gambia and my own country, Peru.

The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2025/271) identifies the lack of respect for international humanitarian law as a key cause of the immense human toll we see today across more than 120 conflicts around the world. In those conflicts, persons going missing are one of the most visible and disastrous results. In 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross recorded the highest number of new cases in over 20 years. This year, the figure is 56,559 new cases. That illustrates the consequences of disregarding international humanitarian law. Critically, it is an issue that affects civilians and combatants alike, affecting not only the victims, but also their families, communities and societies.

The Global Alliance for the Missing, therefore, urges States to take action to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances so as to minimize that tragedy. The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols contain specific provisions on preventing persons going missing, on determining the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and informing families, and on investigating and, where appropriate, prosecuting war crimes resulting in persons going missing or being forcibly disappeared. Those rules are a part of customary law.

It is important to emphasize that those provisions of international humanitarian law — especially those concerning the search for missing persons — remain binding on parties to a conflict long after the fighting has ceased. As such, they also apply in post-conflict situations in which there remain caseloads of missing persons. Many members of the Global Alliance for the Missing have experience of dealing with the issue of missing persons as a long-standing consequence of conflict, and some have benefited from that expertise, having incorporated it early into peace processes that set out a post-conflict path. Mediation and peacemaking efforts offer moments in time at which agreement can be reached to initiate such processes. In our experience, failing to do so makes initiating such processes at a later stage much more difficult. It also risks creating an obstacle to enduring peace, when families are left without answers and forced to live with uncertainty and fear.

The Global Alliance for the Missing, in promoting the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019), notes with interest the adoption of a resolution by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on missing persons in armed conflict, which specifically asks its special envoys to include missing persons in the implementation of their mandates. We welcome similar efforts by regional and international actors to integrate the topic into peace and mediation processes under way across the world today.

Although mediators facilitating dialogue and peace processes can seek to introduce the issue of missing persons onto the agenda, the onus and obligation to do so remains on parties to conflict. That is a long-term endeavour, especially where complex caseloads require multi-disciplinary expertise and cooperation among former parties to conflict. We therefore urge States and parties to conflict to create and sustain the political will to act on missing persons. The efforts undertaken to do so are well worthwhile in creating and sustaining peace.

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

Mr. Greco (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. We express our gratitude to the Greek presidency for convening this crucial annual open debate.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is not only a moral imperative — it is a legal obligation, grounded in international humanitarian law, human rights law and the very principles upon which the United Nations was founded. Yet, we continue to witness unbearable levels of civilian suffering in both new and protracted conflicts.

Conflicts worldwide have proliferated and become increasingly complex. Women, children, persons with disabilities and displaced populations are disproportionately affected by conflict. We reaffirm our commitment to the women and peace and security and the youth, peace and security agendas, and we emphasize the crucial role of gender-sensitive approaches in protection strategies and the importance of including youth voices in decision-making processes to ensure long-term peace in conflict-affected regions.

Italy remains deeply concerned by the increasing disregard for civilian life, including the targeting of essential infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and water systems.

Furthermore, as stated in the annual report on the protection of civilians of the Secretary-General (S/2025/271), 2024 was the deadliest year on record for humanitarian personnel.

We condemn in the strongest terms all violations of international humanitarian law and call for full accountability for those who perpetrate such acts.

Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law is central to the agenda of protecting civilians. All parties to conflict must ensure rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

In the light of that, Italy recalls in particular that access to food is a fundamental human right and must be guaranteed. Yet in too many conflict zones today hunger is being used as a weapon. Farms are burned. Markets are shelled. Aid convoys are blocked. Civilians, especially women and children, are forced to flee violence and often find themselves without the means to feed their families.

In order to translate binding commitments into actions, we strongly believe that the monitoring and accountability mechanisms foreseen must be implemented. Perpetrators must be held to account.

In conclusion, Italy reaffirms its steadfast commitment to multilateralism and to the central role of the United Nations in the protection of civilians. We urge the international community to redouble its efforts and take decisive action to address the pressing challenges of food insecurity, protect essential services and create a safer and more dignified future for all civilians affected by conflicts worldwide. Italy is ready, of course, to do its part.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Timor-Leste.

Mr. Branco (Timor-Leste): I would like to extend my delegation's heartfelt congratulations to Greece on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. We are also grateful for the opportunity to participate in this open debate.

Timor-Leste remains steadfast in its commitment to international humanitarian law and underscores the urgent imperative of protecting civilians in armed conflict. Safeguarding innocent lives must remain a central pillar of our shared pursuit of peace, dignity and universal human rights.

Conflict continues to exact a heavy toll across various regions, shaping political dynamics, straining economies and deepening humanitarian crises. Each conflict is rooted in deep and complex histories, from the ongoing war in Ukraine and protracted violence in the Middle East to armed struggles in parts of Africa and Asia. Political and social realities further complicate their resolution.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of those crises — facing indiscriminate violence, displacement and the collapse of essential services. Especially vulnerable are women and children, as well as humanitarian workers, United Nations personnel, and journalists — individuals whose presence and roles in conflict zones must be respected and protected at all times.

We are deeply alarmed by the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2025/271), which highlights disturbing trends: rising attacks on populated areas, escalating violence against humanitarian personnel, the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, worsening food insecurity and increasing forced displacement. Those realities demand urgent and coordinated action.

In that regard, Timor-Leste calls for the following.

First, we call for full adherence to international humanitarian law and human rights law, particularly the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, by all parties to conflict.

Secondly, we call for unimpeded and secured humanitarian access, ensuring the protection of humanitarian personnel, civilians and those who are hors de combat.

Thirdly, we call for strengthened accountability mechanisms to eliminate impunity and prevent double standards. Perpetrators of violence against civilians and humanitarian actors must be brought to justice through both national and international legal systems.

Fourthly, enhanced cooperation among Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society is needed to build resilient systems for protecting civilians, especially in protracted and complex emergencies.

Drawing on our own experience, Timor-Leste understands the enduring scars of conflict. We remain in full solidarity with all nations striving to protect civilian lives and advocate for the peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue, diplomacy and non-violent means.

The international community must prioritize conflict prevention, diplomacy and humanitarian relief. Protecting innocent lives is a moral imperative and a shared responsibility — one that demands unity, resolve and a firm commitment to peace and justice for all.

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

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Greek presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate on a fundamental issue that lies at the heart of the Council's responsibilities, namely, the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a subject that is treated as a permanent priority of principle at the forefront of the international community's concerns.

The protection of civilians has been one of the moral and legal pillars of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. However, those obligations continue to be flagrantly violated, requiring us to take a serious stand to promote compliance with and implementation of Security Council resolutions, especially those obligations related to accountability and preventing impunity.

The Republic of the Sudan, which is currently fighting back against a war of aggression fuelled by foreign actors, is witnessing first-hand the tragedy of civilians, especially women and children. Indiscriminate shelling of infrastructure, residential areas, forced recruitment and the desecration of hospitals and schools have tragically become a feature of the practices of the Rapid Support Forces and a vicious instrument for perpetrating aggression against the State and atrocities against its citizens.

The psychological and physical effects of those crimes against and violations of children are unspeakable and threaten the future of entire generations. Therefore, we call for strengthening monitoring and psychosocial support mechanisms and undertaking a serious international effort to rehabilitate children affected by the conflict, including by establishing shelters for women survivors to receive psychological care and rehabilitation and address the effects of physical and psychological trauma; implementing cooperation frameworks in partnership with affected communities, civil society and female survivors; and raising awareness and advocacy by enlightened media that contributes to removing social stigma. In parallel, we must work to stop the support that the Rapid Support Forces receives in terms of weapons, equipment, strategic drones and suicide bombs to target our main cities.

In order to strengthen the protection of civilians, the Government of the Sudan has developed a national plan for the protection of civilians in time of war and during the peacebuilding phase (S/2025/49, annex), which has been deposited with both the Security Council and the Secretary-General. And we will prepare periodic progress reports on the implementation of the plan to be transmitted to the Council. Our national plan for the protection of civilians affirms the commitment of the Government of the Sudan to abide by international law, international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions; promote the rule of law; respect human rights; and provide the necessary protection for civilians affected by the armed conflict and the war of aggression being waged against the Sudan, with a special emphasis on protecting civilians and promoting sustainable peace within the framework of national ownership.

Despite the Government's tireless efforts to protect civilians and rehabilitate what was destroyed by the Rapid Support Forces in its imposed war on civilians, challenges remain, including the atrocities committed by the militia which we see in the siege on the city of El Fasher, in clear violation of resolutions 2736 (2024) and 2750 (2024), and the Government's demands regarding the protection of civilians, the stopping of the transfers of arms and mercenaries to the rebel militia and the targeting of the camps for displaced persons in Abu Shouk and Zamzam and the atrocities committed against civilians in those camps, as well as the continued targeting of infrastructure, schools, universities, museums, civil Government institutions, airports, power plants and hospitals in Port Sudan, El Obeid, Merowe, Khartoum, Ed Damer, Atbara and Kusti, which worsens the humanitarian situation of the civilian population.

We appreciate what the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are doing, but their work is constrained by a lack of coordination and duplicated efforts. We therefore call for the establishment of joint field mechanisms that pool humanitarian efforts and prioritize intervention in coordination with the host State. The systematic targeting of humanitarian and United Nations personnel, journalists and women working in the field requires urgent action by the Council

to send a clear and strong message that such crimes will not go unpunished. We stress the need to put in place more effective preventive and oversight mechanisms, including documentation and legal accountability.

With the rapid spread of technology, hate and disinformation campaigns are being used as a way to fuel conflict and incite violence, targeting both civilians and the United Nations system. We therefore stress the importance of developing a digital code of conduct and propose the establishment of a permanent technical team under the auspices of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to monitor and address digital disinformation directed against civilians and international organizations, without compromising freedom of expression.

The protection of civilians is not limited to deterrence and punishment but also requires addressing the root causes of conflict and enhancing community ownership of peacebuilding efforts. We therefore welcome the growing role of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture and stress the importance of funding community-led projects and investing in culturally and socially sensitive community reconciliation initiatives.

In conclusion, we affirm that the protection of civilians is not merely a legal or political obligation, but a moral test for the international community as a whole. We must prove, in word and deed, that the lives of innocent people are not just a margin in the equations of international politics and deals of political interests that turn a blind eye to the vicious aggressor, but rather the essence of any just and humane international order.

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

Mr. Muhamad (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. We also thank the briefers for their sobering insights.

The Secretary-General's recent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2025/271) paints a grotesque and appalling future, with civilians — including women and children — continuing to bear the brunt of armed conflict all around the world.

Malaysia unequivocally condemns violent attacks on civilians in armed conflict. We deplore the targeting of humanitarian and medical personnel, journalists and media workers in conflict situations. We continue to call on all parties to armed conflict to comply fully with their obligations under international law. We also call on all parties to facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for medical and humanitarian personnel and to respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

We also call on the Security Council, as custodian of peace and security, to ensure that the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law are consistently applied in all conflicts. The unacceptable harm civilians are being subjected to in situations of armed conflict is a result of a culture of impunity and the failure of the Council to discharge its Charter-mandated responsibility.

The Council has heard numerous briefings on the dire situation faced by civilians in conflicts — from the Middle East to the Sudan to Myanmar. While in some cases the Council was able to speak in one voice and take decisive action, in other instances, the Council is — regrettably — crippled and paralysed. A case in point is the plight of civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The atrocities in Gaza and the West Bank defy imagination. Nowhere else has international humanitarian law — or international law as a whole — been more brazenly trampled upon than in the occupied Palestinian territory. In the past 20 months, Israel has inflicted unspeakable suffering on Palestinian civilians, in addition to its nearly 58-year oppressive occupation. In Gaza, more than 53,000 civilians have

lost their lives, while more than 120,000 have been injured. Civilian objects and critical civilian infrastructure have been deliberately destroyed. Humanitarian aid and basic necessities for survival are being blocked from entering the Strip. Israel has also set shameful new records in the occupied Palestinian territory, with the highest number of medical personnel, journalists and United Nations staff killed. Is this the behaviour of a moral country — the self-proclaimed only democracy in the region?

As the United Nations commemorates its eightieth anniversary this year, it is regrettable that the solemn oath of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war remains unfulfilled. We must step up efforts to end the armed conflicts raging around the world. We must not normalize civilian casualties in armed conflicts. We must do more to uphold international humanitarian law and implement relevant United Nations resolutions to ensure the protection of civilians. Malaysia will continue to do its part to contribute constructively to that endeavour.

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

Mr. Ekren (Türkiye): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this timely debate.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a shared responsibility and a fundamental duty of the international community. Yet, civilians remain the primary victims in armed conflicts. That is unacceptable and deeply alarming. Türkiye unequivocally condemns all deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as the indiscriminate and excessive use of force. We are gravely concerned about the persistent use of starvation as a method of warfare and support all efforts aimed at addressing and preventing such grave violations of international humanitarian law.

Last year marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions — the cornerstones of international humanitarian law. Their full implementation is imperative. Respect for international humanitarian law is the bedrock of sustainable peace. Impunity undermines the very foundations of the international legal order. Perpetrators of serious breaches must be held to account through credible and impartial instruments. Ensuring unhindered, safe and timely humanitarian access to conflict zones and enhanced protection for medical personnel and humanitarian workers is paramount.

Today, as we witness ongoing conflicts around the world, the imperative to uphold international humanitarian law remains as urgent as ever. This principle is rooted in the painful lessons of the past. Between 1963 and 1974, Turkish Cypriots experienced a period marked by political exclusion, violence, displacement and isolation. Atrocities committed against Turkish Cypriot civilians are well-documented in the United Nations archives. There are also a considerable number of Turkish Cypriots who went missing during this period. Those experiences serve as a stark reminder of the consequences of failing to protect civilians.

Today the situation in Gaza has reached a shocking level of human suffering. Civilians continue to endure indiscriminate attacks by Israel. Gaza's population has been forcibly displaced and deliberately deprived of the essentials of life, whereas just across the border, aid is stockpiling and ready to move. That is unacceptable. Rapid, sufficient and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza is a must.

The conflict in Syria killed, maimed and displaced many, including children. The fall of the Al-Assad regime and the establishment of a transitional Government marks a new era. Türkiye remains committed to supporting Syria's territorial integrity, unity and the well-being of its people. However, civilians continue to suffer due to widespread landmines and the ongoing threat posed by terrorist organizations such as the extensions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Syria, namely, the People's Protection Units, the Women's Protection Units and the Syrian Democratic Forces.

The establishment of a unified national army and transitional justice mechanisms are essential for building peace and preventing the resurgence of violence.

Elsewhere in our region, we remain committed to peaceful and durable solutions in Libya, based on Libyan-led and Libyan-owned inclusive dialogue. In Iraq, our cooperation has gained new momentum, particularly in combating terrorism and ensuring regional stability. Turning to the Sudan, the humanitarian toll has reached catastrophic levels, with millions of people displaced and thousands of civilian casualties. We call for urgent international attention and support to facilitate a durable ceasefire and ensure safe humanitarian corridors.

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, Türkiye has pursued a principled and humanitarian approach. We facilitated direct talks and prisoner exchanges and continue to support diplomatic initiatives towards a comprehensive ceasefire and a just peace.

The erosion of respect for international humanitarian law has reached a critical point. We need to reaffirm our collective commitment to uphold the principles that protect innocent lives. Türkiye stands ready to work with all partners to ensure that protection, human dignity and peace triumph over destruction and despair.

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

Mr. Alajmi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your successful leadership of the Security Council for this month, and for holding this meeting.

In the light of Kuwait's specific experience in dealing with the issue of persons missing during armed conflicts, we are fully aware of the extreme humanitarian importance of such matters. Aside from any political considerations, Kuwaiti families have long suffered as a result of not knowing the fate of their loved ones. That human suffering, which families throughout the world experience, imposes upon us a clear moral imperative to address this humanitarian issue, regardless of any related political matters.

In that regard, we cannot ignore the catastrophic humanitarian conditions that the Palestinian people in Gaza are experiencing. The suffering of families who have lost their loved ones and whose fate is unknown is growing. Moreover, civilians are facing increasing threats at the hands of the army of occupation, owing to the absence of the necessary protection. There must be urgent international action to guarantee the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering of those families.

The disregard that the Israeli occupation has for the international community was made evident by the actions of Israeli forces that fired at a diplomatic delegation, comprising representatives of more than 30 States, during an official visit to the Jenin camp. That is a clear message that its hatred is no longer directed at the Palestinians alone, but at the entire world, clearly challenging international law and all shared human values.

The State of Kuwait believes in the importance of justice and accountability as the main pillars underpinning efforts to achieve reconciliation and a peaceful settlement to conflict and put an end to impunity. Kuwait underlines, therefore, the need to intensify international efforts to guarantee accountability and to strengthen the mechanisms of justice to safeguard durable peace and stability.

Kuwait stresses the importance of operations to recover bodies and identify those missing as a result of armed conflict, especially through forensic methods that would make an important contribution to such efforts, in a manner that would ensure respect for human dignity and bring peace to the families of victims.

Kuwait considers this humanitarian matter to be of great importance and has taken serious steps to deal with its repercussions and effects. The Tripartite Commission to identify the fate of those missing as a result of the 1990–1991 Gulf war was established under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as was its Technical Subcommittee, in 1994.

Furthermore, when Kuwait was a Security Council member in 2018 and 2019, my country shouldered its responsibilities by working towards the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019). That was the first resolution adopted by the Security Council that deals with protecting those missing as a result of armed conflict. The resolution, among other things, called for taking all necessary measures to actively search for persons reported missing, identify their fate and allow for the return of their remains. In addition, it established the appropriate channels to allow for communication with the families of the missing during search operations.

In that regard, I would like to confirm the pivotal role that related international and United Nations mechanisms play in achieving concrete results to determine the fate of the missing, and in alleviating the suffering of their families and giving them closure.

Based on our own experience, we are ready and willing to offer and render aid and to exchange experience in this matter with whoever so desires.

Kuwait also stresses the need to prioritize the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019) in the mandates of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and those of United Nations peacekeeping operations in various regions in conflict, because that resolution is the principal tool to enhance the protection of civilians and to deal with the humanitarian repercussions of armed conflict.

In that regard, we call upon all conflicting parties throughout the world to establish specialized national committees to search for missing persons, and to protect civilians as soon as conflict breaks out. That is an important and practical step towards achieving justice and paving the way towards national reconciliation and the maintenance of security and peace anywhere. Adopting such measures in the early stages of a conflict helps to enhance a society's ability to recover and rebuild trust among its different components.

The State of Kuwait calls upon all Member States to enhance their cooperation and coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross and other relevant international organizations. We call upon them to offer the necessary financial and technical support to build the capacity of countries to deal with these complex humanitarian issues in a manner that would guarantee a rapid and effective response to determine the fate of those missing, and to alleviate the suffering of their families. That would reinforce a holistic humanitarian structure for the protection of civilians and would further entrench the principles of accountability and put an end to impunity, thereby addressing the emerging threats that are currently undermining international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait renews its firm commitment to continue supporting all international efforts designed to enhance the protection of civilians and to guarantee respect for international humanitarian law, and to preserve the dignity of human beings, no matter the circumstances.

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

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, we would like to thank the delegation of Greece for convening this important annual open debate.

Azerbaijan strongly condemns all violations of the laws and customs of war and underscores the critical importance of ensuring accountability for such violations.

In the late 1980s Azerbaijan hosted nearly 300,000 refugees that were forced to leave their homes in Armenia. Many were killed or subjected to violence during the expulsion. Impunity for those acts led to widespread atrocities. Numerous war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of genocide, torture, terrorism and other serious offences were committed during the aggression against my country since the early 1990s, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, large-scale ethnic cleansing, extensive destruction, cultural erasure and significant harm to the natural environment and resources.

Despite the end of the conflict and progress achieved in advancing the peace agenda, serious challenges persist and continue to affect civilians. The conflict has turned Azerbaijan into one of the most heavily mine-contaminated countries in the world. Those hazards pose severe risks to civilians and obstruct the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes in the liberated territories. As a consequence, the number of mine victims in the country continues to rise, reaching 394 since November 2020, of whom 70 lost their lives and 324 sustained severe injuries, most of them civilians, including journalists.

One of the key factors contributing to the high human toll is the placement of landmines and booby traps in civilian areas and objects, often far from the former front line.

The need to clarify the fate and whereabouts of nearly 4,000 missing Azerbaijani nationals is another pressing humanitarian issue. Among the missing, 779 are civilians, including 284 women, 316 elderly people and 71 children. The remains of 176 persons discovered in 25 mass graves and other burial sites in the liberated territories have been identified and returned to their families. The rights of victims and their families require that obligations in respect of missing persons be promptly translated into action, alongside a zero-tolerance policy for impunity.

States are under the obligation not only to prevent, but also to punish the most serious crimes. Azerbaijan has taken decisive steps in that regard. However, most of the perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity. Moreover, the denial of serious violations, coupled with attempts to discredit and thereby obstruct justice through disinformation and smear campaigns, constitute clear contempt for international law and the rule of law. Azerbaijan is committed to ending impunity for serious offences, promoting the rule of law and building, strengthening and sustaining peace and stability in the region.

In conclusion, regarding the use by the representative of Armenia in that country's statement of an invalid name for the locality in Azerbaijan, it is pertinent to recall that all States have a responsibility to recognize and use geographical names established by legitimate national authorities within their sovereign territory. Moreover, for meaningful progress towards lasting peace, that country must stop replicating false narratives that are only counterproductive to the normalization process.

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

Ms. Mohammed: Permit me to start by commending your presidency, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict at this momentous time. We also thank Mr. Tom Fletcher, Ms. Sima Bahous and Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger for their briefings, which shed more light on the realities that we currently face globally.

The theme also underlines the fact that the most critical actors and stakeholders charged with the protection of civilians and protected by notable international norms and standards, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, are increasingly the targets of armed and terrorist groups. This debate is also happening at a time when the capacity of United Nations and African Union

(AU) peace operations and humanitarian actions is overstretched. With funding cuts and limited resources to address the growing protection challenges, we must be more creative to ensure that we continue protecting civilians and facilitating the provision of life-saving assistance to those in need, wherever they are. In addition, the growing complexities of conflicts, including uncontrollable levels and patterns of violence that national and multilateral institutions were not structured and enabled to address, continue to challenge preventive and response tools for effective civilian protection.

Within the African Union, we have taken deliberate and necessary steps to strengthen the protection of civilians across all levels of our work. The AU Compliance and Accountability Framework integrates the four pillars of the AU's approach to the protection of civilians into robust, coherent and operational policies, mechanisms and processes spanning the AU Commission, member States and field missions. It ensures a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that is top-down, bottom-up and lateral, in order to effectively prevent, respond to and remedy civilian harm. That framework encompasses key norms of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and especially addresses sexual exploitation and abuse, in addition to conduct and discipline. It is aligned with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy and integrates the women and peace and security agenda to ensure inclusive and accountable protection efforts.

We also believe that the Secretary-General's review of future peace support operations should boldly take forward enhanced AU-United Nations partnership, pursuant to Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations and article 17 of the Protocol relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. The 2017 and 2023 AU strategic frameworks on peace and security and on human rights, and resolution 2719 (2023) on United Nations support for AU-led peace support operations, provide clear mechanisms for AU-United Nations joint efforts to protect civilians. Those mechanisms include the conduct of monitoring, verification and enforcement missions, using lessons from both institutions, including the more than 15 years of experience in Somalia and the capacities of the AU-European Union-United Nations tripartite arrangement on compliance. Political will and effective actions by the duty bearers that have the primary responsibility to protect civilians, in addition to ensuring tailored and targeted support to communities and individuals in need, should be topmost in our efforts.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the AU remains committed to ensuring the effective implementation of the protection of civilians as a critical mandate and task of United Nations peace operations and of AU-led and AU-supported peace support operations.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Caccia (Holy See): While deeply concerned about the increasing number and intensity of armed conflicts across the world, which continue to inflict profound and disproportionate suffering on civilian populations, the Holy See underscores the urgent need for compliance with international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. It is fundamental that, even in the midst of conflict, the protection of the human person and the inherent God-given dignity thereof remain at the centre of all collective efforts, also in order to avoid the scourge of war. It is particularly troubling that that fundamental principle is increasingly imperilled by the evolving nature of contemporary war.

The human person must never be treated as expendable or reduced to mere collateral damage. Indeed, the deliberate targeting of civilians, including women, children and humanitarian personnel, the destruction of essential infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and places of worship, and the denial of humanitarian access to those in urgent need are of great concern. While those violations are an

immense human tragedy, they also represent a grave affront to the foundations of international security.

In that regard, the Holy See considers it essential to put an end to the use of indiscriminate weapons, landmines and cluster munitions and to stop the deployment of explosive weapons in populated areas. That, together with the cessation of arms production and stockpiling, constitute concrete and urgent steps towards a better protection of civilians. In that regard, my delegation commends the valuable work of the Mine Action Service of the United Nations and calls for the implementation of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. Furthermore, the increasing use of new and emerging technologies for military purposes is also of deep concern. Those developments raise complex legal, ethical and humanitarian concerns, especially in situations in which the use of such technologies could harm civilians. The Holy See therefore strongly supports the proposal of a legally binding instrument prohibiting lethal autonomous weapons systems by 2026. Ensuring that decisions over life and death remain under meaningful human control is not only a matter of legal accountability, but also a moral responsibility.

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

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): I commend the Greek presidency for convening this debate. I also express our sincere appreciation to the representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Committee of the Red Cross and to the other briefers for their insightful presentations.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

Despite all efforts, we are still witnessing an unprecedented increase in armed conflicts all over the world. The killing of innocent civilians, particularly women and children, persons with disabilities, humanitarian aid workers and journalists, continues to rise in different conflict regions. The mass atrocities in Gaza have surpassed all previous records. That is unacceptable. We must act to stop the unabated killings.

Bangladesh has always been committed to the protection of civilians agenda. In 2017, we provided shelter to approximately 1 million Rohingyas who had fled their country owing to the atrocity crimes and the genocide committed by the military. In only the past few months, approximately 100,000 Rohingyas have again entered Bangladesh after being forcibly displaced from their homes. In spite of our limited capacities, we have been hosting them for years.

Allow me to highlight a few points.

First, against a backdrop of multiple conflict situations causing immense suffering to innocent civilians, the Council cannot remain silent. We would like to flag the Council's important role in responding to acts of aggression in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the Rome Statute. Ensuring accountability should be the utmost priority of the Council in order to prevent such heinous crimes.

Secondly, it is essential to ensure unhindered access for humanitarian aid workers and an uninterrupted supply of life-saving materials to the people affected during armed conflicts. We express our concerns about the deliberate killing of humanitarian aid workers and United Nations personnel in Gaza and call for full compliance with international humanitarian law.

Finally, in the context of peacekeeping, we call for a realistic adjustment of mandates to facilitate the protection of civilians.

The President: The representative of Pakistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Saleem (Pakistan): My delegation has been compelled to take the floor to respond to the remarks by the Indian delegation.

Yet again, India has relied on disinformation, deflection and denial. Let me remind the Indian representative that this is an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. No amount of obfuscation can hide the facts: India brazenly kills and maims civilians in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, carried out blatant aggression against civilians in Pakistan and sponsors terrorism and assassination in my country and across the globe. India has even stooped to a new low of impeding the flow of rivers that serve as a lifeline for 240 million people of Pakistan. Water is life, not a weapon of war.

Pakistan, together with the international community, condemned the Pahalgam incident. If India had nothing to hide, it should have agreed to credible, impartial and independent investigations into the incident. On the contrary, India continues to subject the people of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir to State-sponsored terrorism to suppress their legitimate freedom struggle. Between 6 and 10 May, India committed blatant aggression against Pakistan, launching unprovoked attacks on innocent civilians, killing 40 civilians, including seven women and 15 children, and injuring 121 civilians, including 10 women and 27 children.

India certainly has no credibility with which to lecture others on the protection of civilians. Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and sacrifices are well known and acknowledged globally. We remain steadfast in our commitment to combating that scourge in cooperation with our partners around the world. India continues to actively fund and sponsor terror proxies, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Majeed Brigade, in order to kill innocent civilians in Pakistan. Just a couple of days ago, a savage attack on a school bus in Khuzdar, Balochistan, took the lives of innocent school-going children and left dozens injured.

If India is genuinely committed to peace and security and good-neighbourliness, it should end its State-sponsored terrorism, cease its oppression of the Kashmiris, comply with its obligations under international law, the Charter of the United Nations and bilateral treaties and engage in meaningful dialogue for the peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.