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Eightieth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Sekeris/Ms. Georgiou	(Greece)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Koudri
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Denmark	Ms. Landi
	France	Mr. Bonnafont
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Pakistan	Mr. Ahmad
	Panama	Mr. Moscoso
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Ms. Zabolotskaya
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Totangi
	Slovenia	Ms. Jurečko
	Somalia	Mr. Ibrahim
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Ms. Shea

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait and Türkiye to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; Ms. Sung-Eui Lee, Chief Director of the Korean War Abductees' Family Union; and Mr. Ruby Chen, father of Itay Chen.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

Mr. Khiari: I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on this important issue.

Since the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), the number of people affected by armed conflict, including those reported missing in that context, has only continued to increase. In 2024 alone, the International Committee of the Red Cross registered 56,000 new cases of missing persons. There is no comprehensive figure for those missing in conflict, but we know enough that the situation is dire. International humanitarian law, as it relates to missing persons, prohibits enforced disappearance and requires parties to conflict to take all feasible measures to account for those reported missing, while also enshrining the right of families to get information about the fate of missing kin.

This issue is a pressing one among many current situations across the world.

The ongoing hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups continue to generate grave concerns under resolution 2474 (2019). We welcome the recent release of Edan Alexander, an American-Israeli national who had been held hostage in Gaza. That is a source of hope. I echo the Secretary-General's words of profound relief that Mr. Alexander was able to return to his family and loved ones after that harrowing ordeal. However, many more remain missing. An estimated 58 Israeli hostages, 35 of them presumed dead, still remain unaccounted for in Gaza. Despite repeated calls by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, no credible information has been provided on the condition or whereabouts of the hostages. Access by impartial humanitarian actors has also been denied. Their families still seek information about their fate and whereabouts. In addition, Israel continues to withhold the remains of deceased Palestinians, including individuals reportedly buried in unmarked or numbered graves, thereby hindering families' access to information and to closure. Serious concerns also persist regarding thousands of Palestinians detained by Israeli authorities since October 2023, many of whom remain unaccounted for.

In Ukraine, following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reports that large numbers of Ukrainian civilians in areas under Russian occupation have faced detention, with some of them reportedly held incommunicado. According to OHCHR, some of those cases may amount to enforced disappearances. An unspecified number of Ukrainian

civilians, including Ukrainian children, have also been reportedly transferred to the Russian Federation. We welcome the recent exchanges of prisoners of war and exchanges of mortal remains and encourage the sides to step up the frequency, scope and scale of such exchanges as well as efforts to enable the safe return of Ukrainian children to their families.

In Myanmar, instances of individuals believed to be missing or disappeared have arisen throughout the country since the 2021 military takeover. At least 2,000 people have reportedly died while in military custody. A key concern remains the lack of access to legal counsel and due process for some people detained arbitrarily, including members of the elected civilian Government.

Families of many of those who have gone missing in conflicts in years and decades past have yet to learn of the whereabouts of their loved ones. On the Korean Peninsula, we encourage all parties to build on previous efforts and continue the repatriation of remains from the Korean War to their respective countries.

In Syria, the missing persons crisis has been a tragically defining feature of the conflict. Syrian families have made it clear that clarifying the fate of all the missing, regardless of who they are and why they disappeared, is essential to transitional justice and sustainable peace. Given the scale and complexity of the challenge, we need a collective effort. It has to be nationally led and internationally supported. The United Nations welcomes the commitment of the Syrian interim authorities and urges them to work closely with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Disappearances of loved ones create long-term trauma on families and communities. Providing answers for the families of the missing can take decades. For example, the human cost of the 1991 Gulf War still lingers, with 315 Kuwaiti and third-country nationals missing to this day.

The work of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus illustrates how the issue of missing persons remains important not only for the families directly affected but for whole communities, decades after the facts. That is clearly not unique to Cyprus. What is more unique is the continuous support of the authorities — which was reaffirmed publicly by both Cypriot leaders in April — and the existing good cooperation from both side when it comes to the work of the Committee built over time. Together with the strong professional capacity of the bicomunal teams working in the field or in the laboratory, those are the key ingredients for success, which also helps to build conducive conditions for the peaceful settlement of the Cyprus issue.

When the issue of missing persons is left unaddressed, not only individuals but entire societies are unable to move on. That can perpetuate distrust and resentment and become an obstacle to sustainable peace. Goodwill, perseverance and strong international support are crucial elements in the search for missing persons, as is respect for international law. Resolution 2474 (2019) must be fully implemented with urgency. The United Nations remains committed to assisting all parties concerned, including through the use of the Secretary-General's good offices.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Sung-Eui Lee.

Ms. Sung-Eui Lee: For 75 years, I have been waiting for my father to come back. My name is Sung-Eui Lee, Chief Director of the Korean War Abductees' Family Union. I am honoured and privileged to be here at the Security Council, which decided to send United Nations troops to the Korean War to save us. Today I am here to share my father's story, who was forcibly taken to North Korea during the Korean War, in the hope that the Council could help us again, the victims of the war.

First, let me take a few minutes to discuss the importance of resolution 2474 (2019). Although that resolution was adopted recently, long after my father was abducted, it created a legal and moral framework that compels the international community to account for the fate of those who are missing. The resolution finally offers a means for our families to voice the sorrow we face every day and seek remedy and resolution from the Council.

I would now like to introduce our organization, the Korean War Abductees' Family Union. It was started in the middle of the war in 1951 by the wives of abductees and existed until the 1960s. During the first period, it conducted campaigns to rescue abductees and three times made lists of abductees, including an English version, which were sent to the United Nations Command. After a long hibernation of 40 years, it was revived by the descendants of the abductees in 2000. Since then, we have found 11 of the 12 hidden lists known to exist. We have also found some significant documents — from Russia, China and North Korea — that prove the fact of abductions.

Despite all the efforts we have made since that period and up until now, we are still waiting for and missing our loved ones, not knowing where they are or how they have been.

This is a picture of my father, Jong Ryung Lee, wearing court robes when he served as a prosecutor in 1940s. And this is my father and mother together. My father was a 42-year-old-attorney at that time, a loving father of seven children and a husband. He was forcibly and by plan taken by the North Korean regime. I am his youngest child. I was only 18 months old at the time and have no memory of him. For my entire life, I have wondered what it would be like to have a father. Having lost the only breadwinner in the family, as a traditional woman with no education, my mother had to go through years of severe difficulty to make sure our family survived — like many other abductees' families — with never-healing bruises on her heart.

In spite of all the clear evidence, including from living witnesses like us, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has never admitted its abduction crime. This is an ongoing crime, the first and the largest case of enforced disappearance. If this case had been properly resolved at the time it occurred, the subsequent kidnapping crimes committed in many other countries — such as Japan, Thailand and Romania — could have been prevented. That is why the issue of Korean War abductees must be resolved first, because it is indeed the first, the largest and the most clearly evidenced case, with almost 100,000 victims, as well as the key to resolving subsequent cases.

We, the families of war-time abduction victims, therefore have the following to say to Governments, the international community and the United Nations, especially the Security Council.

First, please have the Democratic People's Republic of Korea confirm whether victims are alive or dead. If they are alive, they should be repatriated; if they have already passed away, their remains should be returned.

Secondly, please actively seek practical measures to hold North Korea accountable — for instance, by filing a complaint with the International Criminal Court, to determine their responsibility, or by any other practical means possible.

Thirdly, please establish the truth of the incidents and restore the honour of the victims of wartime abduction. And do not fail to use resolution 2474 (2019) to hold those responsible accountable and to highlight our cases.

Time is running out. Many of the siblings and spouses of the abductees have already passed away. And like us, their children are getting very old. We feel that there is not much time left. Sadly enough, we share that grief with many other victims,

such as the post-war abductees, detainees and prisoners of war and their families. Based on resolution 2474 (2019), I strongly urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to confirm the whereabouts of our loved ones and ensure repatriations.

Family is one of the most fundamental values for human beings, who are meant to be together. Abduction and enforced disappearance are serious crimes against humanity that produce ongoing tragedy. I earnestly plead with everyone — not only our Government and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but also the international community, including the Security Council — to please step forward to secure the human right to be together as a family. I sincerely believe that the Security Council will be on the front line and take up this issue as a priority to be solved.

In conclusion, I would like to read out a poem, written by an unknown abductee, which was found in a Pyongyang prison in 1951.

Oh my country, Oh United Nations
Freedom, you are an immortal phoenix
Leaving our homeland behind
An iron-curtained inferno
We are dragged towards hellish death
Oh my country, Oh United Nations
That you will deliver us from this hell, this death, we have faith.

The President: I thank Ms. Sung-Eui Lee for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Chen.

Mr. Chen: Before starting, I would like to thank Ms. Sung-Eui Lee for coming today. We talked briefly beforehand. I used to work in Korea. I have heard of many tragedies like Ms. Sung-Eui Lee's. I think that just goes to show that this is a universal issue. We all have the same pain. I therefore thank her for coming here and talking to us.

I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council. I also thank the United States, the United Kingdom and France for calling for this meeting and inviting me to brief, as my son is one of the United States hostages still in Gaza.

I am the father of Itay Chen. Itay is an American-German-Israeli citizen who has been held by Hamas in Gaza for 587 days. If you look at the kid, he is a fun-loving kid. He did not have much to care about. He loves basketball and would have been watching an NBA game yesterday. He is a Boy Scout counsellor, with a loving girlfriend and two siblings. I am here with my wife, Hagit Chen, a German-Israeli citizen, and my younger son, Alon. At the age of 18, Itay joined the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and, on that fatal 7 October 2023, was stationed on the Israel-Gaza border. He and his squad fought against Hamas for several hours, protecting Israeli civilians from being raped, burned alive or killed. Eventually, Itay's tank was neutralized by Hamas, and three of the four tank members were taken hostage to Gaza.

Since then, my family, as well as the other 250 families whose loved ones were taken hostage by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, from over 25 different nationalities and five different religions, have been fighting to receive knowledge of their loved ones' fate and for their release. On 24 March, my family was notified by the IDF that Itay most likely did not survive the 7 October attack. But for over 19 months, Hamas has not been willing to acknowledge either that he is in their possession or his physical status. I think that is the lowest form of terrorist psychological warfare imaginable. I humbly ask the members of the Security Council: what kind of human beings take deceased people and use them as negotiating chips? Who denies the deceased the last

basic human dignity that they deserve? What my family has been subjected to — this deliberate withholding of information about our son's fate, the refusal to return him to us — that long silence has been a form of slow, enduring psychological torture.

Please look at my son: 14 years old. Where should he be now? He should be at school. Instead, he is here with me fighting to get his older sibling back. That is not normal. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Dr. Alice Edwards, has recognized that families of hostages might themselves be victims of torture, stating that prolonged uncertainty, the denial of the truth and the concealment of fate can constitute inhuman and degrading treatment. That is our daily reality, with no relief in sight. Today more than 30 families in Israel share the same fate as us. I would like to recognize Leah Goldin — who is sitting behind me — mother of Hadar Goldin. She has been advocating for ten and a half years to secure her son's release from Hamas and was instrumental in the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019). I thank her for being with us today.

Resolution 2474 (2019) was adopted unanimously by all 15 members of the Security Council in June 2019, led by Kuwait, whose representative will be speaking here. The resolution marked a historic step in international humanitarian law by officially recognizing the rights of families to know the fate of their missing loved ones in areas of conflict. Resolution 2474 (2019) obligates parties to armed conflicts — both State and non-State actors, such as Hamas — to search for and account for the missing. Hamas, by refusing to provide information or access to hostages, even to peacemaking entities such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, is in clear violation of the resolution and of international law.

The resolution supports mechanisms to hold parties legally accountable for abduction and kidnapping, including when such actions rise to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The systematic concealment of hostages by Hamas meets that threshold. Resolution 2474 (2019) gives the United Nations and its Members a legal — but even more so, moral — framework to condemn Hamas for its actions and to sanction its backers, such as Iran. The Security Council should demand, first and foremost, the release of the deceased hostages in their possession. Furthermore, the resolution frames the issue of deceased hostages held by Hamas not just as a political or military issue, but as a violation of international law under a Security Council resolution. We are asking, begging and expecting the United Nations to uphold the very resolution it adopted, to implement it with real consequences. There must be accountability for those who withhold the deceased and those who deliberately deprive families of their right to closure. Resolution 2474 (2019) must not remain symbolic; it must become enforceable.

I would also like to draw attention to the religious dimension behind resolution 2474 (2019). The resolution's basis is something simple: that all of those sitting here today are children of God and walk this planet together. As such, there are basic principles that all people should adhere to as people of faith. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Pope Leo XIV, who in his first Sunday sermon called for the release of all of the hostages in Gaza and for a ceasefire.

It is discouraging for the families of deceased hostages that this resolution has not been implemented due to politics and has created an equation that taking hostages, even deceased hostages, is an asset and not a liability. There is a structural gap that must be resolved. Despite the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), there is currently no specific mandate within the United Nations dedicated to addressing hostage-taking as a distinct violation of international law. That omission leaves families like ours without a focal point, without guidance and without adequate representation. That is why we are calling on the Council and the Secretary-General to establish a dedicated United Nations mandate-holder, a Special Representative or

Special Envoy for hostage affairs — similar to the United States, which has a Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs — tasked with monitoring the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019) and addressing the broader range of violations and harms associated with hostage-taking. Such a mandate-holder would provide institutional leadership, coordinate international responses and assure that the commitments that the Council has made are translated into real actions, relief and justice for the victims and their families.

To summarize, my wife and I come here today as parents, like any other parent on the planet, similar to Orna and Ronen Neutra, who are here in the audience today and whose son Omer — like Itay, a United States citizen — is being held by Hamas, and like Iris Weinstein — the daughter of Judi and Gadi Weinstein, United States citizens also being held by Hamas. For lack of a better term, we, the United States hostage families and the 54 other families of hostages in Gaza, are collateral damage — that is the best way I can describe it — in a conflict that has been going on for decades. We want Itay back, and his physical status — whatever it might be — does not make him any less of a hostage. I ask the Council to reflect on the leadership of President Trump, who has demanded, again and again, the release of all hostages in Gaza — the living and the deceased. Since President Trump's inauguration, 46 United States citizens have been released from captivity worldwide, but his work, like that of the Security Council, is not done. We ask the Council, in the name of the deceased, who do not have a voice, to immediately enforce resolution 2474 (2019), with sanctions for those who disobey it.

Lastly, in the light of the negotiations going on in Doha regarding a potential ceasefire in Gaza, we also cannot allow a reality where there will be a new United Nations resolution declaring an end of the violence in Gaza without the release of the last hostage — namely, hostage number 58, as there are still 58 hostages in Gaza — deceased or living.

I thank members for their time and attention, and I request their support to enable families of this tragic fate, such as mine, wherever they might be living, to have closure and at least the ability to move on to the next sad chapter in life. As we have been saying for 587 days, bring them home now.

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

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

Ms. Shea (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari. I also thank Ms. Sung-Eui Lee and Mr. Ruby Chen for their courage in addressing the Security Council in such a compelling way today.

On behalf of the American people, I extend my condolences to the Chen and Lee families for their losses. My heart goes out to them both. We also stand with other families the world over who have had to grapple with this hardship, unsure where their loved ones are, whether they are alive and whether they will be able to dignify their remains with a proper burial.

Almost six years ago, the Security Council addressed this injustice, adopting its first-ever resolution on persons reported missing during armed conflict, with the sponsorship of more than 60 Member States (resolution 2474 (2019)). With that resolution, the Council spoke with one voice, urging parties in armed conflict to search for those reported missing and return the remains of the deceased. But parties to armed conflict have fallen tragically short in terms of implementing resolution 2474 (2019) since its adoption. The bereaved families feel that failure each day in the form of absence and unresolved grief. For them, that failure is persistent and palpable. Today that failure is staring us in the face.

Just today, I met with Dr. Leah Goldin, who has been a tireless advocate, including before the Council, on behalf of all those living and deceased who have gone missing in conflict and have been held cruelly by their captors as bargaining chips. Dr. Goldin has advocated in particular for her son, Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, who, along with another soldier, Oron Shaul, was killed and abducted by Hamas terrorists on 1 August 2014. She said,

“this very institution that brokered the ceasefire, under which Hadar Goldin was killed by Hamas and held captive for the past 10-plus years, has yet to uphold its own responsibility to correct the injustice that followed and implement resolution 2474 (2019) to bring Hadar Goldin home”.

We have an opportunity to right those wrongs and bring solace to grieving families. The Council should take an unflinching look at the impact of failing to hold Hamas — a brutal terrorist organization — to account. Hamas murdered Itay Chen and 1,200 others on 7 October 2023 and now denies their families the chance to bury their remains and have a degree of closure. We call on Hamas to immediately return the remains of Americans Itay Chen, Gadi Haggai, Judi Weinstein-Haggai and Omer Neutra and every other hostage killed or murdered — return them to their families now. Allow the families to mourn. They deserve closure. Thankfully, Edan Alexander has returned home after 583 days in Hamas captivity, thanks to the efforts of President Trump and others. But the United States will not remain silent about the plight of all hostages ripped from their families, nor will we relent until their families are reunited with their loved ones. We once again demand that Hamas immediately release all hostages. Hamas must return the remaining 58 hostages, including those brutally murdered in captivity. The Council will be judged by what we do to bring them home. In addition to recognizing Dr. Leah Goldin, who played a key role in pushing the Council to address this issue, and Ruby Chen, who suggested that this meeting take place today, I would also like to again thank Ms. Lee and all the family members of abductees for their continued advocacy on behalf of their loved ones and all who share that fate.

The Korean War Abductees’ Family Union and organizations like it play a critical role in holding the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to account for its abuses. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is among the most repressive authoritarian States in the world. Its human rights situation is deplorable. The United States remains committed to the immediate resolution of abductees, detainees and unrepatriated prisoners of war. Rather than shield the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea regime from scrutiny, responsible Council members should use their influence to return those abducted, or their remains, to their families. We renew the call for all parties in armed conflict to return the remains of victims such as Itay Chen and actively search for those reported missing, and I would include here United States citizens Paul Overby in Afghanistan and Austin Tice and Majd Kamalmaz in Syria. Our commitment to all United States nationals wrongfully detained or held hostage is reflected in the Levinson Act, named after Robert Levinson, whose family has waited almost two decades for the return of his remains from Iran. The United States will continue to push for the return of all United States citizens unjustly held abroad.

We urge all Member States to fully implement resolution 2474 (2019) and to end impunity for Hamas, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and all other parties to armed conflict that continue to flout it.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to start by thanking the briefers for their powerful and moving testimony and their tireless advocacy.

I would like to make three points.

First, as we heard, the impact of those missing in conflict is lasting and devastating, with families forced to live without knowledge of the fate of their loved ones. As we heard, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) registered 56,000 new cases of missing persons in 2024 alone. The United Kingdom supported the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019). That requires parties to armed conflict to help to reunite and reconnect separated families, to collect and protect information on missing persons and to return remains to relatives. However, in too many cases those requirements have not been fulfilled. As Ms. Lee made clear, despite decades passing, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has still not shared information about those it abducted with their families. It is critical that all parties and stakeholders comply with resolution 2474 (2019) and the provisions of international humanitarian law, and that the ICRC and relevant actors be granted access to information on persons reported missing and to those detained or taken hostage.

Secondly, conflicts around the world continue to tear people away from their loved ones. That includes in Ukraine, where thousands remain missing, including tens of thousands of children forcibly deported to Russia. In Syria, more than 130,000 people remain missing, and we welcome the new Syrian Government's commitment to establish a national commission to clarify their fate.

Thirdly, I want also to highlight the unimaginable ordeal faced by hostages held by Hamas. The Council has heard first-hand from former hostages Eli Sharabi and Noa Argamani of the cruel and dehumanizing treatment to which they were subjected (see S/PV.9882 and S/PV.9868). Hamas must be held accountable for its despicable actions. We welcome the release of Edan Alexander, who was reunited with his family this week. But as we heard from Mr. Chen today, many more families continue to wait in agony. That also includes the families of Avinatan Or, Yossi Sharabi, and Shay Levinson, who have strong links to the United Kingdom.

A ceasefire in Gaza is the best way to bring the hostages home, end the suffering of Palestinians and bring us back to much-needed peace. Far too many have lost their lives and been torn away from their families. No one should have to suffer that fate, whether in Gaza or elsewhere in the world.

It is time for the spirit of resolution 2474 (2019) to be realized, for the sake of all those who remain missing.

Ms. Landi (Denmark): Let me commence by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing, and Mr. Ruby Chen and Ms. Sung-Eui Lee for their powerful and heart-breaking testimony. Denmark stands in empathy with every person who still mourns or searches for loved ones lost in conflicts around the globe.

After 19 months in Hamas captivity, Israeli-American hostage Edan Alexander was released earlier this week. We extend our heartfelt wishes to Edan and his family and we urgently call for that positive momentum to continue.

We continue to condemn the brutal terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 and the ruthless hostage taking by Hamas. The remaining hostages in Gaza must be freed. The suffering must end for the hostages and their families, and so must the suffering of more than 2 million civilians in Gaza, who are at a high risk of famine. The Israeli humanitarian blockade on Gaza must be lifted. We also stress that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) must be allowed access to the hostages in Gaza. The same goes for those held without charge in administrative detention centres in Israel.

As of 2024, the ICRC was tracing open cases for more than 255,000 missing people worldwide. From Ukraine and Iraq to South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the figures are staggering and unconscionable.

As we heard in today's personal testimony from Ms. Sung-Eui Lee, more than 70 years ago hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians were killed and disappeared in the Korean War. That led to decades of anguish and trauma that have haunted generations of Koreans. Whole families remain unable to find the closure or solace in laying family members to rest.

In Syria, we have all witnessed the harrowing crisis of the missing, disappeared and arbitrarily detained. During 14 years of conflict — ending only with the fall of the Al-Assad regime in December 2024 — more than 150,000 people were abducted, detained or forcibly disappeared by regime forces and listed terror groups. The launch of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic is an important step to determine the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria, and to support victims and their families.

In Ukraine, the number of open ICRC cases concerning missing persons is alarming. A recent report published by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine also documented a pattern of systemic failure related to communication by the Russian military of the fate or whereabouts of those disappeared in Ukraine. That is deeply troubling. Denmark unequivocally condemns those actions, especially in relation to the forced deportation of children, leaving hundreds of thousands of families in agonizing uncertainty and despair.

Allow me to make three brief points.

As outlined in resolution 2474 (2019), military planners must integrate management of the missing, prisoners of war and the dead into every combat operation. That includes the systematic registration of detainees, the prompt exchange of information with families and the dignified handling and identification of human remains.

We reiterate that United Nations staff, humanitarian and medical workers and journalists enjoy special protection under the law of armed conflict. Their detention or disappearance in the course of their work also strike fear into communities and destroys families.

In conclusion, as we commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, we are reminded of the profound role the ICRC played in tracing and reuniting those separated from families during the war. In resolution 2474 (2019), the Council reasserted the centrality of its work and the role the ICRC plays in the protection of the missing and arbitrarily detained in conflict. As such, resolution 2474 (2019) is an important component when it comes to the protection of civilians agenda.

The faithful implementation of resolution 2474 (2019) in current and future conflict settings can help to ease the suffering of families, prisoners and civilians trapped in conflict, providing a semblance of dignity and hope amid the chaos and misery of war.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The issue of missing persons is a critical dimension of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In 2019, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2474 (2019), reaffirming its unwavering commitment to international humanitarian law and setting out clear requirements for the prevention and resolution of the issue of missing persons.

Recent years have witnessed escalating turbulence on the global stage and rising geopolitical conflicts. According to the statistics of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), more than 56,000 new cases of missing persons were registered globally in 2024 — the highest increase in 20 years, and resolution 2474 (2019) has not been effectively implemented. In Gaza, the ongoing Israeli offensive and blockade have persisted for 19 months. More than 50,000 Palestinian lives have

been lost. Appallingly, mass graves continue to be uncovered. Countless innocent civilians remain buried under the rubble. In the Sudan, armed conflict has displaced more than 11.6 million people, with the ICRC alone registering more than 7,700 missing persons. In South Sudan, nearly 100 humanitarian workers have been killed, and dozens more remain missing. In Haiti, rampant gang violence has led to frequently reported cases of missing civilians, particularly women and children. Behind those harrowing facts and staggering figures lie countless heartbreaking stories and shattered families — wives who have been searching for their missing husbands for decades and mothers digging through rubble with their bare hands, desperately hoping to find their children. The international community must support affected countries in addressing the issue of missing persons and make utmost efforts to help every scarred family seek answers and find solace.

I would like to share three observations.

First, addressing the issue of missing persons must be guided by international humanitarian law. Any attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers are not acceptable. Parties to armed conflict bear the responsibility to search for the missing; collect, protect and manage relevant information; clarify the whereabouts of the missing to their families; and assist in reuniting families. They must also ensure humanitarian access and provide necessary assistance to humanitarian workers.

Secondly, addressing the issue of missing persons requires a focus on conflict prevention and resolution. As long as wars rage on, the tragedy of missing persons may recur. The Security Council must earnestly fulfil its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security by vigorously advancing dialogue and negotiation, promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes and preventing the outbreak of conflicts in the first place. Parties to armed conflict are obligated to implement Council resolutions, achieve an early ceasefire and cessation of fighting, resolve differences through political negotiation and ultimately eliminate the root causes of conflict.

Thirdly, to address the issue of missing persons, greater support must be extended to the countries concerned. On the basis of respecting national sovereignty, the international community must engage in information exchange and experience-sharing with them, providing targeted assistance to strengthen their national capacities, including the use of advanced technologies to search for, locate and identify missing persons. We support the ICRC and other international organizations in carrying out their work with neutrality, impartiality and independence and in playing an active part in addressing the issues concerned.

China remains committed to working alongside the international community to advance the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019) and to making unrelenting efforts towards resolving the issue of missing persons in armed conflict.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I thank the delegations of the United States, the United Kingdom and France for calling this important meeting. I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing, and I appreciate the vivid and poignant testimonies provided by Ms. Sung-Eui Lee and Mr. Ruby Chen.

We have just heard about the missing persons in two armed conflicts — one of the oldest wars which occurred soon after the establishment of the United Nations and the dire conflict that we are witnessing today. Yet, during that 75-year time span, the agony of families and the psychological impact on societies of not knowing the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones have remained the same.

Last year, the world saw the highest increase in the number of missing persons in two decades, with more than 56,000 new recorded cases. That unprecedented

situation largely stems from increasing armed conflicts and a prevalent tendency to disregard obligations under international law.

Above all, the existing legal framework for addressing missing persons in armed conflict must be observed. A coherent legal framework to prevent enforced disappearances during armed conflict is already in place. It is firmly grounded in international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2474 (2019). The Geneva Conventions, in particular, set out clear obligations for parties to conflict: to register detainees and prisoners of war, maintain records of the deceased and their burial sites, and facilitate data-sharing, which are all essential measures to prevent families from enduring the anguish of uncertainty.

Despite that seamless legal framework, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. In Syria, an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 persons remain missing. In the Sudan, nearly 1,000 cases of enforced disappearance have been reported since April 2023, though the actual number is believed to be significantly higher.

At such a critical juncture, inaction amounts to tacit acquiescence. The Security Council should continuously speak with one voice and urge parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their legal obligations. In that regard, we reiterate our strong demand for the release of all hostages taken by Hamas and stress the urgent need to clarify their fate.

In order to effectively address the issue of missing persons, multilayered innovative approaches should be explored. All concerned States, parties to armed conflicts, the United Nations and other international organizations, civil society, media and the private sector should come together to that end. In that respect, we fully support the continuous cooperation between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi authorities within the framework of the Tripartite Commission to search for, identify and return the persons who went missing during the Gulf War in 1991.

Support from international organizations is also indispensable. The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, established by the General Assembly in 2023, reflects the need for a central mechanism that serves both as an information hub and a point of engagement for victims and their families.

Back at home, the Korean people know how a voluntary initiative led by the media can result in a dramatic outcome. The television show titled “Finding Dispersed Families”, which was broadcast live for 140 days in 1983 in Korea, turned out to be a huge, unexpected success. The programme reunited 10,000 families who had been separated since the Korean War and had not even known that their loved ones lived in the same part of the country. The television programme was later inscribed on UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, an estimated 100,000 civilians were abducted by North Korea during the three-year-long conflict. According to the 2014 report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the wartime abductions by the North Korean authorities were widespread and organized with the objective of recruiting labour and expertise. That constitutes a large-scale, premeditated enforced disappearance of civilians, which amounts to crimes against humanity under international law. North Korea not only denies the very fact of the abductions, but it has also continued to abduct and detain a significant number of South Korean people and citizens of other countries, including Japan, up until recently. Given the advancing age of the abductees and their families, this is an urgent matter that can no longer be delayed. My Government once again strongly urges North Korea to resolve all issues relating to abductees, detainees and unrepatriated prisoners of war, including by offering an official apology, verifying the victims’ fate and ensuring their safe and immediate return.

In conclusion, we should be reminded that the ultimate resolution of the missing persons issue lies in conflict prevention and peaceful settlement. We should therefore remember that those who are displaced or who have become refugees through conflict today may become missing persons tomorrow. That is why the Council should seek ways to responsibly tackle this vital issue now.

Mr. Moscoso (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Panama is answering the call to participate in this briefing on the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019), the first Council resolution devoted exclusively to missing persons in armed conflict. We also thank the briefers for their moving contributions. We are with them and support them in their grief.

Today we meet to consider a profoundly human dimension of war: the right of families to know the fate of their loved ones. There are no time limits on that right; it does not depend on time, place or type of conflict. It is a universal right. Resolution 2474 (2019) sets out a clear road map: prevent disappearances, register detainees, actively search for the missing, protect remains and guarantee families information. It is a legal obligation, but over and above that, it is a moral duty. The disappearance of persons in armed conflict contexts not only leaves deep scars on families; it also tears at the social fabric and undermines the foundations of lasting peace. It is a tragedy that perpetuates suffering, hinders reconciliation and undermines the full restoration of the rule of law.

Panama underscores that this resolution must be implemented in a universal and consistent manner. The obligations related to the search for missing persons are clearly established in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Protocols II and III Additional thereto, adopted in 1977 and 2005, respectively. Those norms are binding on all parties in all conflicts, regardless of their nature and provisions. They are not time-bound and cannot be subordinated to political or private interests. All parties — whether State or non-State — must do their utmost to clarify the whereabouts of missing persons and provide the families with appropriate answers, even long after hostilities cease.

In the global South, protracted conflicts and military invasions, whether disguised as special operations or as just causes, and internal crises financed from abroad have left a trail of disappearances and uncertainties. From war-torn communities in the Middle East and Africa, to the battlefields of Europe, the Middle East and the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, thousands of families continue to live with the anguish of not knowing the whereabouts of their loved ones with certainty. The search for those who never returned remains an open wound that is crying out for truth, justice and reparations. The victims are always the same people: peasants, Indigenous communities, the elderly, women and children. In other words, it is those who do not bear arms, but who nevertheless bear the cruellest burden of armed conflicts.

Panama knows that anguish all too well. The scars of our history, especially those caused by the military invasion of 20 December 1989, still linger in our collective memory and remain a source of uncertainty and controversy. It is estimated that between 250 and 500 people lost their lives, and at least 100 remain missing to date. That reality compels us to acknowledge that the disappearance of persons in armed conflicts is not only a humanitarian tragedy; it is also a symptom of the structural inequalities of the international system and of a geopolitics that does not always apply its principles consistently in all contexts. That lack of consistency must end. The universality of international humanitarian law cannot remain an unfulfilled promise.

That is why the search for missing persons must be placed at the centre in peace processes, in ceasefires and in all post-conflict reconstruction, without exceptions or conditions. Political will must not remain limited to declarations or resolutions;

it must be translated into concrete actions. The search for missing persons requires more than a moral commitment. It requires sufficient resources, specialized technical capabilities, appropriate institutional infrastructure and a sustained approach over time. International cooperation is essential to ensure that States, especially those with limited resources, receive the necessary support to conduct dignified exhumations, state-of-the-art forensic analysis, accurate identification of human remains and respectful restitution of those remains to the affected families.

Panama considers it essential for States to strengthen their national search mechanisms, promote mutual cooperation and support regional and international efforts to guarantee the right of families to know the fate of their loved ones. As part of a broader commitment to the protection of human dignity and the right to truth, Panama also ratified key instruments of the international human rights system, including the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons. Although those instruments are part of a different legal regime, they complement efforts to prevent and eradicate all forms of disappearance, including disappearances that occur outside of armed conflict. Panama also reiterates its support for the International Committee of the Red Cross, whose impartial and professional work is essential to locating missing persons, protecting their families and effectively applying international humanitarian law.

Resolution 2474 (2019) represents a significant step forward by the Council in recognizing and addressing the tragedy of missing persons in armed conflict. But simply recognizing the problem will not suffice. While the resolution remains in force, other crucial actions have been paralysed by the use of the veto, thereby perpetuating conflicts, aggravating human suffering and condemning thousands of families to live in uncertainty, without truth, justice or answers. Panama reiterates its solidarity with countries that are facing conflicts and with communities that are affected by the disappearance of persons. We believe that only through united legislative, judicial, humanitarian and diplomatic efforts will it be possible to honour the victims and prevent new cases from remaining unresolved. We will continue to support all efforts that make the right of families to timely responses a tangible reality, while ensuring the protection of human dignity, even in the darkest moments of armed conflict.

Mr. Koudri (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank Mr. Khaled Khiari very much for his valuable briefing. We also listened attentively to the briefings given by the two civil society representatives and to their experience with disappearance.

Every missing person has a story, and every story is told by family members, with tears in their eyes, who endure the misery of loss and the pain of absence. That is a tragedy — a tragedy recounted by grieving mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who continue to languish in expectation. It is a human tragedy that deserves our sympathy and calls to mind the vision of our founding fathers, who created the United Nations on the ashes of world wars so that children would not inherit the scourge of the gun and the hatred of war. We must now ask ourselves whether we remain true to the vision of those who dreamed of peace. Are we, the heirs to those principles, capable of breaking the brutal cycle of war? Is the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, capable of shouldering the responsibility with which we were entrusted? And if we are incapable of safeguarding human dignity — the precondition to every right — then the United Nations is nothing but a slogan.

International humanitarian law sets out a road map. International law, be it the Geneva Conventions or the various Security Council resolutions, which are binding on all, including resolution 2474 (2019), proposed by the sisterly State of Kuwait, comprehensively address every single aspect of the fate of missing persons. We also

have the presidential statement put forward by Algeria last year (S/PRST/2024/4). That notwithstanding, the number of missing persons continues to increase as if we have failed to learn from the mistakes of the past. In 2024 alone, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recorded more than 56,000 new cases of missing persons in more than 120 conflicts — 56,000 stories of pain, 56,000 dreams languishing between heaven and hell. Those figures represent families surviving on hope — the hope that those loved ones will one day return home. When we disregard the law and this becomes the norm, then tragedy becomes routine and loss becomes the policy. Once again, we call for the adoption of clear, firm and transparent mechanisms that will ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law and that all those who violated the law be held accountable. This is not optional: it is a duty. No one is above the law. No one is unaccountable.

We call for the names of those deprived of their liberty to be duly recorded and for their families to be informed of their fate. The mandate of the ICRC must be respected so that it can duly perform its monitoring role and thereby ensure that detained persons are treated humanely and are allowed to communicate with their families. Parties to armed conflict must record and transmit information concerning the persons in their custody to the adversary. Parties must search for and retrieve the bodies of those killed, treat them with dignity and record all available information with a view to identifying the dead and returning their remains to their families.

Pain must not beget further pain. Suffering is no justification for further suffering. Of the 56,000 persons reported missing last year, 11,000 were in Gaza. They were in Gaza — a land that is small but immense in suffering. Gaza alone endured one fifth of the world's suffering in one year. Those who do not see in that figure a cry for help have lost sight of their humanity. Any attempt to justify what is taking place in a land in which international law is absent must be decried. The suffering in general, and the loss in particular, of the Palestinian people did not begin with 7 October 2023. It began with the onset of the occupation, which continues to claim Palestinians — alive and dead. They go missing in the prisons of the occupation. They go missing because the occupation continues to take them hostage. Their families are denied the bodies of their loved ones and the opportunity to say a final farewell and to give them a decent burial in line with all laws and canons.

According to the national campaign for retrieving the bodies of martyrs, the occupation authorities are withholding the bodies of the 198 Palestinians killed in 2024 alone. That figure excludes the Gaza Strip and brings the number of bodies withheld by Israel to 641. As unacceptable as that state of affairs may be, it is unfortunately legal in that the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in September 2019 that an Israeli military commander is permitted to withhold the bodies of Palestinians whom the Israeli army killed and to bury them temporarily with a view to subsequently using them as bargaining chips. Whoever has adopted that policy has no right to preach, to lecture others or to play the victim.

The absence of loved ones cannot be erased and, over time, it stands in the way of peace and entrenches hostility. Trust cannot be fostered in a land permeated by suffering and replete with open graves. Adherence to the law is therefore a precondition to preserving our humanity. Peace, of which we all dream, might be the most fitting way of averting wars and their consequences forever.

Mr. Bonnafont (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Khiari, for his briefing. I also wish to thank and pay tribute to Ms. Sung-Eui Lee and Mr. Ruby Chen and their families. I pay tribute to their courage and their testimony and say to them that, around this table, there are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters who cannot but empathize with what they are enduring and stand with them.

International humanitarian law and human rights law cast a duty on us, as does the pain of the families and the loved ones of persons who disappeared in armed conflict, irrespective of whether they perished on the battlefield, were taken hostage, were forcibly disappeared or were prisoners of war whose names went unrecorded. That two-fold duty, both moral and legal, prompted the Council six years ago to unanimously adopt resolution 2474 (2019) — the first to be devoted to persons missing in armed conflict. I agree with Mr. Chen that the Council must take action to better implement the resolution.

First, the Security Council must continue to demand that parties to conflicts abide by their obligations under international law to prevent disappearances before, during and after armed conflicts. Those obligations are unconditional and are not subject to reciprocity. We are thinking first about Gaza, where France has, since 7 October 2023, been calling consistently for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages detained by Hamas and other terrorist groups, including eight of our compatriots. According to the Israeli army, 57 hostages are still detained in the enclave, including 34 who have been declared dead. Every effort must be made to enable their release and the repatriation of their remains, and everyone knows how urgent it is for a ceasefire to be reached and for humanitarian aid and peace negotiations to resume. Those obligations also apply to Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Thousands of Ukrainian families are waiting for information about the fate of their loved ones, and 20,000 children are thought to have been deported to Russia, according to the Ukrainian authorities.

Resolving the issue of missing persons is also important for consolidating peace. We are thinking of Kuwait and Argentina, where thousands of families are still waiting for information about the fate of their disappeared relatives — a wait that has gone on for decades. The United Nations must not lose interest in their fate. That is also the case with Syria, where we call for truth and justice for the more than 130,000 people missing since 2011. That is a must if the country is to be able to rebuild. In that regard, we welcome the work carried out by the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, Syrian civil society organizations and other United Nations inquiry mechanisms, including the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. We support the cooperation between the new Syrian authorities and those mechanisms.

Secondly, the Council must reaffirm the central role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which takes its mandate from the Geneva Conventions. Parties to conflicts must cooperate with the ICRC, in particular its Central Tracing Agency, and provide it with access to information, places of detention and protected persons. France supports the role that the ICRC can play in facilitating confidence-building measures as part of peace negotiations and agreements. We also reiterate our support for victim associations and human rights advocates, whose role is distinct from and complementary to the ICRC.

Thirdly, the international community must fight against immunity for those responsible for forced disappearances by basing ourselves on human rights, which provides additional protection to that offered by international humanitarian law. Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, enforced disappearances amount to crimes against humanity when they are committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian populations and conducted knowingly. The Council can still make referrals to the Court if and when such crimes are committed. France also recalls the central role played by the International Convention for the

Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and calls on all those States that have not yet done so to ratify that crucial Convention.

Even war has its laws. The Council must act to ensure that they are respected. France is committed and determined in that regard.

Mr. Totangi (Sierra Leone): Sierra Leone thanks the presidency for convening this important meeting at the request of the United Kingdom, the United States and France. We also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his sobering briefing, and we take note of the testimonies shared by Ms. Sung-Eui Lee and Mr. Ruby Chen. Our thoughts are with them and their loved ones.

Sierra Leone remains deeply concerned about the rising number of missing persons in armed conflicts worldwide, which now exceeds 254,000 cases, as reported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and highlighted in the Secretary-General's report. That is not just a humanitarian concern — it is a profound human tragedy. Thousands of people are presumed dead or forcibly disappeared. Those disappearances often result from abductions, extrajudicial killings and forced removals. Many victims remain unidentified, and families are left searching for answers and closure, sometimes for decades. According to ICRC data, active investigations into missing persons have reached alarming levels — more than 130,000 in Syria alone, more than 17,000 in Lebanon and thousands more across Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. In Ukraine, for instance, there has been a significant rise in the number of missing persons, including children forcibly separated from their families.

Sierra Leone underscores the importance of strengthening efforts to trace the missing, delivering justice and restoring the right of families to know the fate of their loved ones. We support mechanisms established to address that issue, such as the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and we call for greater cooperation with the ICRC and similar humanitarian organizations. We also highlight the long-standing case of missing persons resulting from Iraq's 1990 invasion and occupation of Kuwait, which remains an unresolved humanitarian issue. Despite progress, the fate of many Kuwaiti and third-country nationals remains unknown. We recall the relevant Security Council resolutions, which have outlined Iraq's responsibility to cooperate in locating missing persons. Sierra Leone joins the calls for continued efforts in fulfilling those obligations in accordance with international humanitarian law and Security Council decisions.

The anguish of the families of missing persons and their fear, helplessness and pain can perpetuate intergenerational trauma and fuel cycles of violence and mistrust. Those dynamics hinder reconciliation and peacebuilding. Peace negotiations and transitional justice processes must explicitly integrate measures for addressing missing persons, including truth-seeking, victim support and memorialization. Resolution 2474 (2019) remains a milestone in establishing clear obligations on parties to conflict to prevent disappearances, trace the missing and enable the return of remains. It affirms that protecting civilians and respecting human rights are not optional but fundamental obligations under international law. Sierra Leone supports practical measures under the resolution, such as proper detainee registration, the establishment of national information bureaus and the training of armed forces on international humanitarian law compliance.

The impact of missing persons is particularly severe for children, who are vulnerable to displacement, recruitment, exploitation and separation from their families. The chaos of conflict obstructs the tracking and reunification of missing children, leaving families in prolonged states of distress. Women and girls are also disproportionately affected — often victims of sexual violence, trafficking and

forced marriages. Many go missing in those circumstances, further deepening the trauma and destabilization of the affected communities.

Sierra Leone remains committed to the full implementation of resolution 2474 (2019), the biennial General Assembly resolution (resolution 77/220) and broader efforts to prevent and resolve cases of missing persons in conflict. We advocate for strengthening cooperative frameworks and propose the establishment of a global database on missing persons in armed conflict. That initiative would facilitate timely information-sharing and cross-border collaboration for family reunification and justice. Furthermore, we support the development and adoption of standardized international protocols for reporting and investigating missing person cases. Such protocols would harmonize procedures and enhance the effectiveness of search and identification efforts.

We also stress the need for international cooperation to address root causes, such as conflict, poverty, human trafficking and displacement. In that regard, we highlight the resolution on missing migrants and refugees in Africa, adopted in 2021 by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which calls for protection of the rights of families and legal frameworks for prevention and accountability.

Behind every missing person is a story — a family waiting for news, a community disrupted and a future interrupted. The international community must not relent in its efforts to bring answers, dignity and justice to those affected.

Sierra Leone reaffirms its unwavering commitment to upholding international humanitarian law, promoting accountability and advancing multilateral cooperation to address the plight of missing persons in armed conflict.

Mr. Ibrahim (Somalia): Let me begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khalid Khiari for his briefing today. We also took note of and listened carefully to the briefings of Ms. Lee and Mr. Chen.

The issue of missing persons in armed conflict is a deeply humanitarian one, with profound and lasting consequences for individuals, families and communities. While conflicts have historically taken a toll on civilians, that toll is not acceptable. In that context, my delegation would like to emphasize several pertinent points, drawing upon the principles enshrined in resolution 2474 (2019).

First, we underscore the critical importance of preventing persons from going missing as a result of armed conflict and addressing the root causes. As highlighted in resolution 2474 (2019), parties to armed conflict bear the primary responsibility for taking all feasible steps to ensure the protection of civilians and prevent disappearances.

Secondly, the development and upholding of national laws, together with compliance with responsibilities under relevant international humanitarian instruments, are vital. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Protocols Additional of 1977 are a key part of the legal framework to safeguard civilians in armed conflict. Parties to armed conflict must bear the primary responsibility for taking all necessary steps to ensure the protection of civilians, including reducing the number of cases of missing persons.

Thirdly, increased international cooperation and support are an important way forward to address this issue. Sharing information and expertise is crucial. Such support and cooperation should be tailored to the needs of the country in conflict and provided at its request. We welcome the positive role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and its Central Tracing Agency in assisting in the search for missing persons and supporting the families affected. As we learned today, the International Committee of the Red Cross registered 56,559 new missing persons cases in 2024 and was following more than 254,000 cases. Those numbers

are alarming. We encourage States to continue to collaborate with and support the ICRC in that regard.

Drawing from collective experience, we underscore the important role of truth, justice, reconciliation and accountability in consolidating peace and achieving sustainable peace.

In conclusion, the plight of the missing and their families is a humanitarian challenge that transcends borders and touches us all. It is our shared responsibility to uphold the dignity and rights of those affected. My delegation reaffirms its support for the objectives of resolution 2474 (2019), and we call upon all parties to honour their obligations and to place humanity at the centre of their actions.

Ms. Zabolotskaya (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We note the contribution made by the briefers to today's discussion.

Russia supports all efforts to facilitate the search for missing persons in armed conflict, including resolution 2474 (2019). Those separated by war should be able to learn the fate of their loved ones and to be reunited with them if they are alive. States' obligations in that regard are enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Protocols Additional thereto.

Russia is one of the States most affected by the issue of missing persons. Millions of citizens of the Soviet Union remained missing after the Second World War, and considerable efforts were made to find them, with the contribution of the International Committee of the Red Cross. However, that issue has never been a subject of consideration by the Council.

We do not believe that the Council's discussion on certain aspects of the aftermath of the Korean war of 70 years ago contribute to resolving the current situation on the Peninsula. The key destabilizing factor in the region continues to be the growing military presence of NATO countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which is systematically destroying prospects for a collective security architecture independent of alliances.

Searching for missing persons is, first and foremost, a humanitarian issue, one of great importance to those who have survived conflicts. At the same time, the search for missing persons, like any other humanitarian activity, needs to be carried out in coordination with the States affected, complementing their efforts. We must develop substantive cooperation and provide effective assistance to Governments. The international community has the tools to do that at its disposal.

In that regard, humanitarian organizations have an important role to play, including those related to the International Committee of the Red Cross, alongside neutral mediators among States. We must recognize that it is much easier to address such issues in the absence of undue political attention. Unfortunately, the general trend to politicize the international agenda has also affected the humanitarian sphere. Even such an important matter as the search for missing persons has become a tool of political pressure. We also see how fake assistance is imposed on States, under convenient pretexts. That approach is counterproductive and leads to a reduction in humanitarian cooperation. In that regard, we have seen the establishment of a number of institutions related to the issue of missing persons, which are instrumentalized for political ends.

For its part, Russia is making every effort to search for missing persons and restore family ties in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. We are grateful to the International Committee of the Red Cross for its assistance in ensuring the exchange of information in that area, as well as for mediation efforts concerning the repatriation of civilians. The Human Rights Commissioner of the Russian Federation, Tatiana Moskalkova, and the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria

Lvova-Belova, as well as the Russian Red Cross Society, are very closely involved in information exchange with the Committee.

We would like to express our regret that Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari decided today to repeat false statements taken from the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. That Office's outputs are fully controlled by the Kyiv authorities. Therefore, it is incapable of providing any objective information. At the same time, unfortunately, Mr. Khiari did not even mention that there are also missing persons of Russian nationality, which, sadly, can be regarded as a case of double standards.

We have also taken note of what the delegation of the United Kingdom has repeatedly said, in reference to some 20,000 abducted children. I would like to stress that, time and again, we hear the same figure, without any details, proof or information to verify it. At the same time, no one mentions the fact that approximately 2,000 civilians went missing in Kursk oblast as a result of the incursion by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. When we liberated part of that territory in March, 378 people were found, and further searches are ongoing. We know that some of those people are being held by the Kyiv authorities as hostages and human bargaining chips for the purposes of exchanges, as they themselves openly admit.

We would like to welcome the release of Edan Alexander, the American-Israeli hostage, and of all other hostages released earlier by Hamas. We hope that this gesture will facilitate the swift reaching of an agreement between Hamas and Israel, through the mediation by Egypt, Qatar and the United States.

In conclusion, we would like to commend all efforts to search for missing persons in armed conflicts around the world. We are not convinced, however, that the Security Council is the best venue to address these issues, especially in their historical context.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his insightful briefing and for the sobering assessment of the question of persons reported missing during armed conflict. I also thank Ms. Sung-Eui Lee and Mr. Ruby Chen for sharing their testimonies as family members with loved ones who were abducted. We commiserate with them on having to endure those difficult experiences.

One of the most difficult consequences of armed conflicts is the incidence of civilians and combatants alike who remain unaccounted for.

Nearly six years ago, the Security Council recognized the increasing urgency of addressing that challenge and unanimously adopted resolution 2474 (2019). Complementing that significant step, the Council adopted a presidential statement on missing persons last year (S/PRST/2024/4), which was spearheaded by Algeria, Guyana, Sierra Leone and Mozambique. While those products have added to the international legal framework on the issue of missing persons in armed conflict and enforced disappearances, the Council has an obligation to maintain its focus on this critical issue since it remains an ever-present feature of armed conflicts.

Allow me to recall the Secretary-General's 2024 report on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) in which we were informed that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) registered 40,000 new missing persons cases in 2023. That was the highest number of annual registrations recorded at that time. Sadly, the ICRC has said that this unprecedented rise continues, with the organization having registered 56,000 new cases in 2024, as was said before. It should be emphasized that those new cases are in addition to those pending from decades-old conflicts.

In that context, Guyana continues to view resolution 2474 (2019) as an important tool for international efforts to address the issue of missing persons. The resolution

provides a set of critical guidelines that States can and should use to create holistic national frameworks for the prevention of disappearances, the identification of missing persons, as well as the creation of measures to actively search for and to return the remains of those recovered to their families. Critically, the resolution also calls on parties to an armed conflict to ensure access and to cooperate with the ICRC in addressing the issue of missing persons. We echo that call and express support for the efforts of the ICRC in the execution of its mandate.

States are obligated to prioritize the safety of civilians and civilian infrastructure during armed conflict, which is the most effective step that can be taken to prevent incidents of missing persons. Effective early warning systems are critical for advancing such efforts. States should also have appropriate mechanisms that allow families of the missing to register cases and to create databases that will guide future search and recovery efforts.

It is imperative that in the pursuit of just and lasting peace, cases of missing persons do not go unaddressed. On that note, Guyana highlights the incidents of missing persons in ongoing conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wars in Ukraine, Myanmar, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among others. We continue to condemn the unlawful detention of persons in those and all armed conflicts and stress that parties to conflicts have an obligation to ensure their well-being while in detention, including through visits by the ICRC. Families of persons detained have a right to information about their loved ones.

We are particularly alarmed by cases of ill treatment of persons detained in conflict and condemn such actions in the strongest terms. There is an undeniable risk that the lingering uncertainty around the final status of persons missing in conflict can perpetuate feelings of mistrust among former conflicting parties and undermine subsequent peace efforts. We therefore encourage peace mediators to prioritize that issue in the conflict resolution process.

In conclusion, Guyana reiterates its call for States to design and implement national and regional mechanisms which address with urgency and efficiency the issue of persons missing as a result of armed conflict. For the survivors of war, while physical scars may heal with time, the unseen emotional scars cannot begin to heal without closure and without certainty about the fate of those they love. Reconciliation is a critical element of sustainable peace, and reconciliation cannot be fully achieved if all conflicting parties do not demonstrate a commitment to addressing any incidence of missing persons in a manner that prioritizes truth and accountability.

Ms. Jurečko (Slovenia): I would like to thank the briefers — Assistant Secretary-General Khiari, Ms. Lee and Mr. Chen. I thank Ms. Lee and Mr. Chen for their courage to deliver their testimonies. Their harrowing accounts emphasize the need for the issue of missing persons to be addressed also by the Security Council. I wish to extend our condolences to Ms. Lee and Mr. Chen.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the release of American hostage Edan Alexander. Slovenia repeats its call for the release of all remaining hostages in Gaza and for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to be granted full access until their release.

Last year the number of missing persons reached record high — more than 56,000 missing persons — surpassing the record number of the year before last. That horrific number is one of the results of the unprecedented number of conflicts in the world, accompanied with continued blatant violations and disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We should not be looking at this as mere statistics. This is real life for many thousands of victims and for their families who are, sometimes decades after the end of armed conflicts, still searching for their loved ones.

I come from a country that witnessed this in its own region. The wars in the countries of the former Yugoslavia ended decades ago, yet their legacy remains deeply felt. Of the more than 40,000 people who went missing during the armed conflict in the 1990s, around 10,000 have still not been found. There are mothers still searching for their children and wives who are still preparing dinner for their husbands and sons just in case they return. There are families that continue the harrowing journey of establishing the truth about the fate of their loved ones, and that prolonged search has consequences, for their own healing, for appeasement between nations and for much-needed reconciliation in the region.

Addressing the issue of missing persons is thus not only a moral duty, but also a cornerstone for ensuring lasting peace and stability in the region. In that context, I want to highlight the importance of initiatives such as the Berlin process, particularly the work of the Working Group on Missing Persons. I must also mention the invaluable assistance and contribution of the ICRC in that regard.

Regional cooperation and renewed political commitment are essential to make progress. We look forward to actively participating in the upcoming Berlin process summit, which will take place later this year in London.

We believe this debate and any debate that concerns international humanitarian law is needed and necessary.

The rules of international humanitarian law protect civilians; they protect the missing and their families. The States and parties to conflicts are required to clarify the fate of the missing and to investigate and prosecute crimes resulting in persons going missing. That is a moral imperative and a legal obligation, reaffirmed in resolution 2474 (2019).

The horrors that we have vowed to never repeat are being replayed before our eyes every day.

There are tens of thousands of missing persons in ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, the Sudan and Gaza, where hostages are still being held and thousands of Palestinians are missing — many under the rubble, some in mass graves.

Long after the conflicts and wars have ended, there are thousands still missing in Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Iraq.

We call once again for all States and parties to conflicts to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law at all times and in all circumstances. We call for more accountability and a strong commitment to fight against impunity, including through cooperation with the International Criminal Court. We call for stronger cooperation between States in finding missing persons and for cooperation with the ICRC.

Finally, we call for the respect and full implementation of resolution 2474 (2019).

Mr. Ahmad (Pakistan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important briefing on the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019), which addresses the critical issue of missing persons in armed conflict. I also express our gratitude to the briefers for their invaluable insights.

Resolution 2474 (2019), on missing persons in armed conflict, is a reflection of our shared commitment to a fundamental principle: that even amid the chaos of war, humanity must prevail. It is a solemn recognition of the pain and suffering endured by countless families who continue to wait for their loved ones. Yet, despite this collective will, the tragedy of missing persons persists — a silent crisis that afflicts communities in all conflict situations.

Resolution 2474 (2019) seeks to prevent persons going missing in conflict, ascertain the fate of the missing and to ensure the protection of their families' rights. It also reaffirms the responsibilities of parties to armed conflict under international humanitarian law.

The issue of missing persons is particularly acute in conflict zones and occupied territories, from Palestine to the occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Missing persons are not just numbers. They are fathers who never returned home, mothers separated from their children, young boys who disappeared in the dead of night and daughters whose fates are sealed in silence. Their absence is a wound that never heals, leaving families trapped in an endless cycle of hope and despair.

Missing persons and enforced disappearances are a grim reality of the nearly eight-decade-long Jammu and Kashmir conflict. In Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, unmarked and unknown graves of thousands of victims have surfaced in recent years. Investigations have revealed that these victims were first disappeared by Indian occupation forces and then tortured to death or summarily executed.

According to the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, the occupying Power continues to deny the existence of thousands of enforced and involuntarily disappeared persons from Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir and is reluctant to conduct forensic investigations into the more than 7,000 unmarked mass graves. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in its 2018 and 2019 reports on Kashmir, recommended independent, impartial and credible investigations into all unmarked graves in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Despite calls for investigations and accountability, the plight of missing persons continues to worsen in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Following India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019, thousands of young boys were abducted, and many remain missing. The recent terrorist incident in Jammu and Kashmir was used as a pretext to round up more than 2,000 people, with a view to further oppressing the Kashmiris struggling for their legitimate right to self-determination.

The ongoing tragedy in Gaza highlights the devastating impact of armed conflict on missing persons and their families. Since October 2023, more than 14,000 Palestinians remain unaccounted for — many buried beneath the rubble of destroyed homes, their voices silenced by unrelenting bombardment. This dire situation demands urgent action to account for every missing person, restore family connections and uphold the fundamental rights of those lost in the chaos of conflict.

In countless other situations of armed conflict around the world, families continue to suffer the agony of uncertainty regarding their missing loved ones. These are the cruel consequences of conflict and unchecked impunity.

Allow me to make a few key points.

First, we call on all parties to conflicts to comply strictly with international humanitarian law, protect civilians and ensure accountability for violations.

Secondly, we urge all Member States to enhance cooperation, including through mutual legal assistance and data-sharing, in order to trace and identify missing persons. Coordinated international efforts are essential for addressing this challenge.

Thirdly, humanitarian access must be ensured. Humanitarian organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, must be allowed to operate freely in conflict zones to document, trace and support missing persons and their families.

Finally, the plight of missing persons is a symptom of the larger issue of continuing unresolved conflicts, which is the root cause. Conflict prevention and

dispute resolution are therefore crucial in addressing the issue of missing persons. The sustainable peace and reconciliation processes can significantly reduce the risk of disappearances.

We must always keep in mind the human dimension of the issue of missing persons. We must work collectively to uphold the dignity and rights of all those affected by conflict and ensure that missing persons are not forgotten. Strengthened international cooperation, the effective implementation of international legal obligations and greater humanitarian engagement remain key to effectively addressing this pressing humanitarian issue.

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

Let me start by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his remarks and our two briefers — Ms. Sung-Eui Lee and Mr. Chen — for their powerful testimonies.

In a few days, the Security Council will hold its annual open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and we feel that today's discussion is very timely.

Resolution 2474 (2019), adopted unanimously in 2019, constitutes a landmark in our collective efforts to address the plight of missing persons in armed conflict; underscoring, *inter alia*, that States must address the issue holistically, effectively and in a credible manner.

However, our collective efforts to achieve these standards seem to fall short. Greece is deeply concerned of the increasing number of cases of missing persons. These cases are not mere statistics, but individual stories of severe hardship and distress.

Finding every missing person is more than a legal obligation; it is a moral imperative that contributes to the alleviation of suffering and to reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts in conflict and post-conflict zones.

Customary international law applicable to both international and non-international armed conflicts proclaims that all feasible measures must be taken to account for persons reported missing as a result of the armed conflict. Equally, their families deserve information on their fate. When the families of missing persons are denied information, that amounts to inhumane treatment. The right of families to know the fate of missing relatives is central and strictly connected with the obligation for the parties to the conflict to gather information about persons reported missing, but equally to their obligations regarding the treatment of the remains of the dead.

I welcome the representatives of the Member States that requested to participate in our discussion today and will elaborate on the cases their countries have been dealing with.

As a matter of principle, Greece fully supports the work of the United Nations, among others, through the establishment of commissions for missing persons, as part of existing international practice. The role of such commissions in tracing the fate of the missing cannot be overstated. They are crucial in that they stress to the parties their clear obligation to cooperate in good faith with each other and with the commission, because such cooperation is critical for their mandates and success.

It is crucial for the international community not to lose sight of that fact in a number of cases, such as Kuwait, Syria, Ukraine, or in the occupied Palestinian territories, where the horrendous terrorist attack of 7 October 2023, followed by the extensive hostilities in the Gaza Strip, has left neither side untouched.

I wish to refer specifically to the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, recalled in resolution 2723 (2024), which commends the Committee's ongoing work, work that should be supported in order to bring an end to the suffering of the families of the missing persons.

I also seize this opportunity to praise the vital role of the International Committee of the Red Cross and express our support for the work of its Central Tracing Agency, as it strives to locate and identify missing persons, prevent loss of contact with loved ones, support families and restore family links.

For resolution 2474 (2019) to have a tangible impact, political will must be reinforced, by prioritizing certain areas. Among other things, we should prioritize registration, identification and facilitation of family reunion. Equally, we must demonstrate respect for the rights of families to know about their relatives reported missing in connection with armed conflicts, particularly children reported missing, through the establishment of data collection and information-sharing systems on best practices.

Last but not least, we must leverage new and emerging technologies to redouble our efforts in terms of a victim-centred approach, with utmost care for the necessary psychosocial and economic support.

In conclusion, the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019) is imperative for the mitigation of the grave humanitarian consequences of armed conflict. In our collective effort to implement it, we must not lose sight of the human rights component, which goes hand in hand with that of international humanitarian law. In times of increased volatility and turbulence, we must do our utmost to preserve our common humanity.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Ms. Sung-Eui Lee for their briefings. I also thank Mr. Ruby Chen for his powerful briefing.

I speak not as a diplomat, but as a father, as a husband and as a human being, when I say Ruby should not have had to be here today. He should not have had to sit before the Council and explain how his son was murdered, how his body was taken, how he was left in the dark for months. But he did. He did it with dignity and with courage, with a strength no one should ever have to find. We will not rest until Itay is returned. That is our most sacred obligation, because bringing our sons home is who are.

Also with us are Leah and Menachem Goldin, the mother and brother of Hadar Goldin. Hadar Goldin was murdered and kidnapped in 2014 during a ceasefire that was brokered by the United Nations and the United States. That ceasefire was meant to allow for a humanitarian pause in the fighting. Instead, Hamas used it to ambush Hadar, murder him and steal his body. Almost 11 years have passed, 11 years of unanswered questions, 11 years of a family unable to bury their son. His mother, Leah, has become a shining light of courage and moral clarity. She has raised her voice when so many others stayed silent. She has become the conscience that the United Nations, the Council and so many others in the international community have failed to find. When the international community failed to act, Leah refused to sit quietly. We thank her and will repeat her call — bring Hadar home.

Also with us in the Chamber today are Orna and Ronen Neutra, the parents of Omer. Omer was a 21-year-old Israeli-American and a proud son of Long Island, New York. He was killed on 7 October 2023 during Hamas' brutal attack. His body was also taken into Gaza, where it remains held by Hamas to this day. For more than

a year, Orna and Ronen lived in agonizing uncertainty, hoping their son was alive. Their tireless advocacy kept his story in the public eye. They have spoken of Omer's love of sports, especially soccer, basketball and volleyball. Omer was a warm and caring young man who lit up any room he entered. Omer's story is a stark reminder of Hamas' vile tactics, denying families the basic dignity of mourning and burial. We stand with the Neutra family in their grief.

Before we speak of international law, we must speak of something more basic, more ancient, more human — the moral obligation to return the dead to their families. It is not a political principle. It is not a Western norm. It is a universal duty shared by every nation, rooted in every religion — in Christianity, Islam and Judaism — which all hold the burial ritual as sacred. It is engraved into the conscience of every human being to bury the dead, to mark their names, to let their families grieve in dignity. Not only has Hamas violated that obligation in the sickest way, but it has built an industry out of it. They steal the bodies of the murdered and use them as bargaining chips. They parade them in the streets. They store them in tunnels. They use them to extort, to negotiate, to delay and to benefit. They do not treat the dead with respect. They treat them like inventory. To them, the remains of a murdered son or daughter are no different than cash in hand. Hamas has created an economy of death. Look at the videos from 7 October 2023. They spent a lot of time and energy carrying bodies while they were fighting, but they were expending energy to abduct bodies into Gaza. It is a system, not an accident; a strategy, not a tragedy.

However, so many in the Council, so many righteous nations, have said next to nothing. There are currently 58 hostages being held in Gaza — some alive, some murdered — all denied their rights, all denied access, all denied the dignity that should never be in question.

As we heard today, the Council adopted resolution 2474 (2019) in 2019. I was here when it happened. It called on all parties in armed conflict to account for missing persons, to return the remains of the dead, to provide information, to allow families to grieve and to recognize that those acts are not gifts — they are simply human. Hamas has violated every letter of that resolution repeatedly and openly. Where is the response? Where is the demand for compliance? Where is the basic moral outrage? Hamas' desecration of that resolution and the fundamental inhumanity it represents is beyond words, and the international community looks away.

That is not just a crime against Israel, it is a warning to the entire world. If that becomes the new normal, if the taking of bodies become an accepted and successful tactic, then no family, no soldier and no civilian will be safe from the same fate. Today it is us — we are dealing with it. Tomorrow it could be anyone. The battlefield will not end at death. It will follow the fallen into the grave.

We ask the Council not for sympathy, but for action. We call on the Secretary-General to fulfil his mandate under resolution 2474 (2019) by including a dedicated section in his next report on the protection of civilians. That section must document the full extent of this ongoing atrocity: every hostage still held by Hamas, every stolen body, every Israeli missing since 7 October and every fallen soldier whose remains have yet to be returned from past wars. We support Mr. Chen's call to designate a special United Nations representative to promote and advocate for the return of deceased hostages — both our fallen heroes and all those deprived of peace around the world. The obligation to bring our people home does not fade with time; it endures until the mission is complete.

As Council members know, in the ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone*, a young woman defies the king's decree in order to bury her brother. She knows the price. She knows the consequences. But she chooses to act. In death, her brother is still her brother, and he deserves his dignity. That is a story that is thousands of years

old, in a different language and a very different world. Still, it reflects the same universal truth that we are asking the Council to remember today: that to withhold the right of burial is to violate something far deeper than law; it violates what makes us all human.

In our own tradition, we have a similar story. When King Saul, the first King of Israel, fell in battle, the enemy took his body and hung it on the walls of their city. But his followers risked their lives and travelled behind enemy lines to recover his body and give him a proper burial. They understood what even the Council too often forgets: that how we treat the fallen defines who we are in life.

The ancient Israelites did what was right not because they were told to, but because their conscience demanded it. Antigone buried her brother because it was what justice demanded. Today the State of Israel will continue to act with the same conviction. We will not forget our dead. We will not leave them behind. We will not allow Hamas to turn memory into a weapon. That is our duty, and it will be fulfilled.

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

Mr. Marzooq (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of Iraq expresses its thanks and appreciation for the efforts made by Greece as President of the Council this month, and it commends the delegation of France for its efforts as President last month. We thank Mr. Khaled Khiari for his briefing today.

We value the efforts of the Security Council in discussing this noble and important humanitarian issue, one of whose consequences is the remnants of international wars and conflicts, even those that occurred a long time ago. We believe that the responsibility to search for missing persons and determine their fate is a collective humanitarian responsibility that should involve national and international efforts, through the relevant international humanitarian organizations and agencies, to achieve results that lead to the discovery of the whereabouts and remains of the missing by putting in place international humanitarian mechanism based on the principle of cooperation and technical assistance.

While we commend the many roles and tasks undertaken by the Security Council, in accordance with its mandate under the Charter of the United Nations, we stress the importance of addressing the root causes of conflicts in order to achieve sustainable peace and security through dialogue, consultations and negotiations aimed at bridging differences and ending conflict, based on our shared collective responsibility. International humanitarian organizations should address and engage in those issues; doing so requires technical work on the ground.

Like other countries affected by conflicts and wars, Iraq has suffered from the growing number of persons who have gone missing as a result of the senseless wars waged by the former dictatorial regime in Iraq and of the war on terrorism in my country. Iraq is still tirelessly striving to determine the fate of thousands of Iraqi victims who went missing as a result of the military operations of the 1980s and 1990s. Mothers, wives and children are still waiting to learn the fate of their loved ones and relatives. We take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the efforts made by the teams of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) — as the most experienced, competent and specialized international body when it comes to discovering and helping to determine the fate of missing victims — in the search for missing persons by providing technical assistance and cooperation. Iraq is confident in the ICRC's good performance, the capabilities of its staff in the field, the concrete successes that it has achieved in several places worldwide and its ongoing work with Iraqi teams. Iraq is also working constructively with ICRC teams and underscores its strong support for the efforts of other international organizations and bodies in addressing the issue of missing persons, in line with the 1949 Geneva Conventions and as stipulated in resolution 2474 (2019).

Iraq recognizes the importance and priority of this issue, and it affirms its full commitment and readiness to working with the international community to find effective solutions to address its repercussions through specialized international bodies known for their expertise in dealing with missing persons issues, including the United Nations.

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

Ms. Michail (Cyprus): At the outset, I wish to thank the Greek presidency for organizing this meeting on an issue of profound humanitarian and moral significance, as well as the briefers for their compelling statements.

Resolution 2474 (2019) — a historic resolution, as the first Security Council resolution devoted solely to missing persons in armed conflict — underscores the critical importance of addressing the issue not only as a humanitarian obligation, but as a pillar of reconciliation, post-conflict recovery and lasting peace. The plight of missing persons during armed conflict transcends borders, politics and ideologies. Too often, the voices of those who vanish in the chaos of war — and the anguish of their families — are left unheard, their fates unaccounted for. Resolution 2474 (2019) aims to change that reality by reaffirming the centrality of international humanitarian law, particularly the obligations of parties to armed conflict to prevent disappearances, search for missing persons and facilitate access to information.

Resolutions, no matter how powerful in language, require concrete action, and the challenges remain daunting. With the upsurge of conflicts around the world, the scale of enforced disappearances and missing persons is staggering. Lack of political will, restricted humanitarian access and the use of disappearance as a tool of war are just some of the barriers to fulfilling the purpose of resolution 2474 (2019). We must therefore reaffirm our commitment to its implementation by strengthening international cooperation, holding perpetrators accountable, placing victims and their families at the centre and investing in technology and data-sharing.

Cyprus is no stranger to the painful legacy of missing persons and is all too aware of the need to accelerate the meaningful implementation of the Council's resolution. The situation in Cyprus is a decades-old humanitarian tragedy. As a result of intercommunal violence in the 1960s, and mainly the Turkish illegal military invasion of 1974, more than 2,000 individuals — Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and citizens of countries whose representatives are represented around this table — went missing. The fate of many remains unknown to this day. The missing persons in Cyprus are both combatants and civilians, including elders, women and children.

International humanitarian law provides that parties to a conflict must take measures to account for persons reported missing because of armed conflict and provide their families with information on their fate. In the case of Cyprus, Türkiye failed to take measures to prevent persons from going missing during its illegal invasion of the island and to this day refuses to account for the missing, to investigate their disappearance, determine their fate without distinction or provide their families with information concerning the circumstances of their death. Notably, it refuses to disclose relevant information from its military archives, to provide full and unfettered access to possible burial sites and provide information concerning the relocation of the remains of missing persons.

The establishment of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus in 1981 — under United Nations auspices and with the cooperation of both communities — has been a critical step forward. To date, the Committee has exhumed, identified and returned the remains of 1,054 individuals, giving answers to many families who had been left in the dark for decades. But the work is far from complete. Hundreds remain

unaccounted for. And with each passing year, eyewitnesses pass away, memories fade and evidence risks being lost forever.

In addition to supporting the efforts of the Committee on Missing Persons, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus has also been implementing its own programme of exhumations and identifications of remains of missing persons in the areas under its effective control, since 1999. All information in the possession of the Government has been submitted to the Committee.

There is an urgent need for Türkiye to adopt and sustain a proactive approach towards providing the Committee on Missing Persons with all necessary information, assistance and cooperation in order to locate and identify the missing, by ensuring the immediate, unconditional, unhindered and uninterrupted access to all areas in the occupied part of Cyprus, including military zones and providing the Committee with all information in its possession, particularly from its military archives. Let us be clear: the passage of time must not be an excuse for inaction. On the contrary, it must spur greater urgency.

The Security Council has long recognized the importance of resolving the issue of the missing in Cyprus, referenced regularly in its relevant resolutions, by reaffirming that its resolution is essential for building trust between the communities and advancing reconciliation. But trust cannot be built on silence. Reconciliation cannot be achieved while families are denied the right to know the fate of their loved ones.

Resolution 2474 (2019) provides a powerful framework, but frameworks must be implemented by action. Cyprus offers a test case — not only of our commitment to the resolution, but of our collective will to uphold the dignity of victims and to heal the wounds of conflict through truth and accountability. We urge the Council to continue calling for the full implementation of resolution 2474 (2019) in Cyprus and elsewhere and to recognize that resolving the fate of the missing is not only a legal obligation under international humanitarian law, but also a moral imperative and a precondition for peace. Every name recovered, every person identified not only gives closure to their family, but it also reaffirms our common humanity. Resolution 2474 (2019) should not just remain a milestone, but become a living instrument of hope, healing and accountability.

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

Mr. Alenezi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the friendly country of Greece and its Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York for their efforts to convene this meeting, which is being held today to follow up on the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019), submitted during my country's presidency of the Security Council in June 2019. That resolution introduced a unique humanitarian dimension that touches all of us and contributes to strengthening international efforts aimed at addressing the question of persons missing as a result of armed conflicts. I would also like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, for his briefing.

Resolution 2474 (2019) is an important addition in the series of resolutions adopted by the Security Council in the framework of the protection of civilians. The resolution clearly and explicitly established a robust institutional and normative framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts free from all political considerations and interests.

Our follow-up today on the implementation of the resolution comes at a critical time in the light of the bitter conflicts being witnessed at the regional and

international levels that do not respect people's humanity, international resolutions or international law. The confrontations on the ground are based on an inhumane intellectual arrogance that threatens international peace and security. Therefore, it is necessary today, in this Chamber, to reaffirm the need to abide by that resolution.

The conflicts of today and yesterday, owing to the prevalence of selfish decisions, have affected untold numbers of civilians, including those who were missing as a result of armed conflicts. Wars and armed conflicts have tragic repercussions on the lives of civilians in general. No war and no regional or international conflict erupts without missing persons being the primary victims. They are lost in the darkness, and the hearts of their families are suspended between hope and despair.

Against that background, adherence to humanitarian and legal practices is not merely a duty but also a bridge that connects the concerned parties to a common negotiating ground that builds trust and the foundation for dialogue, and providing information, revealing the fate of the missing persons, reuniting them and treating them with dignity in accordance with humanitarian standards is not only a moral duty, but a cornerstone to prevent impunity and hold those responsible accountable. When everyone abides by the rules of international humanitarian law, the impact of the conflict transforms into a framework for achieving peace.

In that regard, the Kuwaiti experience is telling, as Kuwaitis endured immense suffering at the end of the twentieth century. That bitter experience and its humanitarian dimensions touched every home and family in Kuwait, whether they were Kuwaiti or a family of residents of Kuwait. I must therefore shed light on that experience and its humanitarian dimension today, more than 35 years later.

For Kuwait, it is a deep wound that has not yet healed. Efforts on the ground to search for the remains of 308 remaining missing persons continue. In reality, that bitter experience shattered families, separating the missing from their children and their parents.

However, we believe — just as we believed six years ago when the Council adopted resolution 2474 (2019) by consensus — that no one on Earth is abandoned and that the missing are not forgotten. We hope that the search efforts conducted under the umbrella of the United Nations, especially the Security Council, will continue, and we reaffirm our firm position on this purely humanitarian question.

To ensure more progress on the ground, we believe that there is a need to appoint a high-level United Nations official who would be exclusively responsible for following up on the expanded process of identifying the remains of all missing persons and that the Secretary-General's periodic reporting mechanism must also continue. We stress the need for Security Council members to play their part. They must underscore the need for all parties concerned to abide by the provisions of resolution 2474 (2019) upon the outbreak of any conflict, be it an internal or a regional conflict, as the resolution provides a road map for alleviating the suffering of families and missing persons and healing their wounds. Accordingly, we call upon all representatives of the Secretary-General and of peacekeeping missions on the ground to adhere to the resolution and to provide, in their reports and briefings to the Council, comprehensive information at the various stages of a conflict. Doing so is of paramount importance in reassuring the families of missing persons and in facilitating reunification. It would accelerate peace negotiations, peace settlements, transitional justice processes, reconciliation, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, while ending impunity.

In conclusion, I commend you, Mr. President, your friendly country and its Permanent Mission for convening this meeting. I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations for his enlightening briefing. We wish

him every success as he strives to defend the right to a decent life and the right of every family to know the fate of their sons and daughters, be they alive or deceased.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): Allow me to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and the briefers.

At a time when civilians are bearing the brunt of armed conflicts around the globe, Türkiye remains deeply committed to strengthening international efforts to protect civilians and to addressing the tragic issue of missing persons. Addressing the plight of missing persons is not only a moral imperative but also essential for achieving lasting peace and stability. The international community bears a shared responsibility to uphold the right of families to know the fate of their missing loved ones.

The United Nations plays a pivotal role in promoting effective mechanisms for the search for, and identification and return of, missing persons in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. The issue demands a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Türkiye consistently advocates for depoliticized, impartial and results-oriented efforts to address that challenge, with full respect for international law. We believe that effective cooperation, transparency and the exchange of information are key to resolving cases of missing persons.

The issue of missing persons remains one of the most tragic and pressing humanitarian consequences of the Syrian conflict. Tens of thousands of Syrians, maybe more, are still unaccounted for, which is causing unbearable suffering for countless families who are seeking truth and justice. We welcome the efforts of the new Syrian Administration to address that critical issue. The recent announcement by Mr. Al-Shaibani during his address to the Council on 25 April (see S/PV.9904) regarding the establishment of a national commission on missing persons is a step in the right direction. We sincerely hope that the commission will operate transparently, independently and in close cooperation with international mechanisms, including the United Nations Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Addressing the fate of missing persons is not just a humanitarian imperative.

The situation in Gaza has descended into an unparalleled humanitarian crisis, with the protection of civilians having all but collapsed. Nearly the entire population of Gaza has been displaced. Thousands of people, mostly women and children, have been killed or injured, and many remain buried beneath the rubble. The continued blockade on humanitarian aid since March has resulted in acute food shortages and imminent catastrophic hunger. We should remind Israel of its obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including resolution 2474 (2019), and call for full compliance and accountability. We welcome the release of Edan Alexander earlier this week and reiterate our call for an immediate and sustained ceasefire and the release of hostages and detainees in line with United Nations resolutions and the full implementation of the agreement that entered into force on 19 January and was brokered by Egypt, Qatar and the United States. That remains the only viable path to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, securing the release of all remaining hostages and detainees and upholding the principles of international law.

The fate of missing persons in Cyprus cannot be taken up in a vacuum, and neither can it be addressed without considering the historical circumstances that led to the tragedy. The issue dates back to 1963 and is a humanitarian matter affecting both the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot sides. It should not be politicized or presented as an issue affecting only Greek Cypriots. A considerable number of Turkish Cypriots went missing during the period from 1963 to 1974, and their whereabouts are still unknown today. It should be understood that the majority of

Turkish Cypriot persons missing since 1963 have proven to be civilians, whereas the majority of Greek Cypriot missing persons were military personnel. Türkiye, as a guarantor in Cyprus, has given strong political and financial support to the work of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, since its inception in 1981. The Committee has access to military zones in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. It is considered one of the most successful Committees in this field. It has been operating efficiently and continues to deliver successful results. We believe that the work of the Committee should continue on its own merits, with the collaboration of the two sides on the island.

The baseless allegations by the representative of the Greek Cypriot Administration, who portrayed a selective and one-sided interpretation of history and of the present state of affairs, shall indeed receive a response from its very counterpart, namely, the Office of the Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, whose voice unfortunately cannot be heard on this platform today, despite its request to attend the meeting. The Turkish Cypriot side is one of the two parties on the Committee on Missing Persons, which operates under the auspices of the United Nations. Its absence here, while the other party is being represented, is both unfair and unacceptable. The Turkish Cypriot people — the co-founders of the 1960 partnership State — were forced out of the Government institutions and legislative and judicial organs of Cyprus in 1963, a decade before the Turkish intervention. Atrocities against Turkish Cypriots are well-documented in United Nations archives. Consequently, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus was deployed to the island in 1964. That alone attests to the fact that the Cyprus problem did not begin in 1974, but a decade earlier.

During the following decade, 180,000 Turkish Cypriots were displaced multiple times and forced to live in scattered enclaves. Greek Cypriot representatives have long been misinforming the international community by portraying the Cyprus problem as one of “invasion” and “occupation” in referring to the legitimate and justified Turkish intervention on the island, which was carried out in accordance with the Treaty of Guarantee and only upon the coup d’état that declared Greece’s annexation of the island.

In conclusion, Türkiye reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and calls for stronger international cooperation to address the plight of missing persons, uphold humanitarian principles and ensure accountability.

For the Council’s information, I had a conversation with international members of the Committee — non-Greek and non-Turkish — and they are happy about Türkiye’s cooperation and the Turkish Cypriot side.

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

I kindly ask Member States participating under rule 37, when they refer to other Members States, to refer to them by the constitutional name at the United Nations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.