



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

## 9632<sup>nd</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 21 May 2024, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*


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

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Koudri
China . . . . .	Mr. Tian Bingxu
Ecuador . . . . .	Ms. Osorno Holguin
France . . . . .	Ms. Freudenreich
Guyana . . . . .	Ms. Hazlewood
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ono
Malta . . . . .	Mr. De Bono Sant Cassia
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Young Kim Moon
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Vorobiev
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Ms. Mambu
Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Slamic
Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Carpenter
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Rogers
United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Strainic

## Agenda

### Protection of civilians in armed conflict

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

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

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

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*The meeting was resumed at 3.05 p.m.*

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

I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

**Ms. Leendertse (Germany):** Let me begin by reaffirming Germany's unwavering commitment to international humanitarian law. We share the concerns raised by Mozambique and the Organization about negligence regarding that body of law — the reason why today's meeting was organized — and we are confident that this open debate will help to raise awareness of the needs, suffering and rights of civilians trapped in armed conflict.

Civilians are the main victims of war. Protecting them during armed conflict, in particular vulnerable civilian groups such as women, children and displaced persons, is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. The report of the Secretary-General before us (S/2024/385) paints a sobering picture of the appalling harm inflicted on countless civilians across the world's conflict zones. My delegation shares the belief that the protection-of-civilians agenda calls for respect for international law, with the Charter of the United Nations at its core. And to put it very clearly, Germany supports the universal and equal application of international law and international humanitarian law, whether in Ukraine, Gaza, the Sudan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Resolution 1265 (1999) was an important achievement in its recognition of the fact that the protection of civilians is a matter of international peace and security. Increasingly, attacks on civilians and medical and humanitarian personnel are making it impossible to ensure that those most in need can receive the assistance they require in order to survive. In that context, I would also like to draw members' attention to the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We think that it remains a key instrument in addressing the grave humanitarian consequences of the use of such weapons.

To conclude, and to return to my first point, I want to raise the case of a particular group of civilians who are exposed to war and conflict — women and girls. In 2023, Germany took over the lead on the call to action on protection from gender-based violence in emergencies. During its leadership, Germany has followed four main objectives — better situating the call to action as a cross-stakeholder working platform, improving accountability for protection from gender-based violence, establishing sustainable partnerships with local and women-led organizations and improving their inclusion in the humanitarian system.

The protection of civilians must be at the core of our humanitarian-development nexus efforts, whether they are women, girls, men or boys, as well as in the face of increased mission drawdowns and transitions.

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

**Mr. Lagdameo (Philippines):** As a nation that champions the primacy of international law, the Philippines continues to adhere to the principle of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

This year, as we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), the Philippines joins others in calling for its full implementation and for respect for international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law with a view to protecting civilians in armed conflict. Even in times of conflict, international human rights law remains applicable, providing further protection for civilians. In that regard, we urge all parties to conflicts, including non-State armed groups, to comply with resolution 1265 (1999). Recognition and respect for human dignity, human rights and human welfare are paramount for that purpose.

As our contribution to this goal, the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict has been embedded in Philippine laws, including the Act on Crimes against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide and Other Crimes against Humanity, or Republic Act 9851, and the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law, Republic Act 11188. We support the view that respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law is crucial to preventing hunger and further suffering in conflict situations, and to protecting the civilian population and civilian objects in general. We agree that international humanitarian law provides the legal framework to strategically mitigate the impacts of armed conflict

and is applicable to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We also reiterate our support for the Convention on Cluster Munitions, as the prohibition of cluster munitions protects civilians and civilian infrastructure, especially in urban conflict areas.

The protection of civilians must be at the core of peacekeeping mandates. The three-tiered approach to protection is key in that regard, as outlined in the policy on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping: protection through dialogue and engagement, the provision of physical protection and the establishment of a protective environment. Indeed, United Nations peacekeeping operations have explicit mandates to protect civilians, as authorized by the Security Council. Those mandates include such measures as the establishment of safe zones, disarmament and the facilitation of humanitarian aid.

The Philippines believes that success in peacekeeping operations must be measured by how well we protect civilians and how effectively we ensure that the environments required for peace to flourish are sustained. Therefore, expectations regarding protection tasks must be succinct and clear, connected to political strategies in the field and focused on prevention. Next year, we hope to further enhance our active participation in the protection of civilians affected by armed conflicts with the projected increase of Filipino peacekeepers on the ground, including highly trained women peacekeepers.

The protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict is a priority for the Philippine Government. Given the chance, we hope to bring and share our experience on this matter to the Security Council in 2027–2028.

Finally, today's open debate and the week-long side events on the protection of civilians are important avenues for discussing key issues and trends, sharing best practices and reflecting on required policy and normative changes in order to ensure that civilians are protected in times of conflict. The Philippines is pleased to co-sponsor two side events this week. The first one is entitled "Civilian-centered approaches to the protection of civilians: what works, why and advancing acceptance within the international system"; and the second one is entitled "Sparing water from armed conflict for enhanced protection of civilians". We can do more to protect civilians in armed conflict

by working hard together and in partnership with various stakeholders.

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

**Mr. Edbrooke** (Liechtenstein): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to commemorate the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) today. Resolution 1265 (1999) marked an explicit recognition by the Council of the need to uphold international humanitarian law, urgently reduce civilian harm and end armed violence. We acknowledge the central role of the International Committee of the Red Cross in moving the protection of civilians agenda forward, and the brave and important work of all humanitarian actors in conflict.

Thematic resolutions have further developed the protection of civilians agenda over the past 25 years, including by addressing emerging realities and technologies of conflict. Today we see concerning trends in the use of artificial intelligence, lethal autonomous weapons and cyberwarfare, which require the careful development and application of existing legal principles and standards. Liechtenstein has contributed to that effort, including through our publication of a report on the application of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to cyberwarfare.

Twenty-five years on, Liechtenstein sees the protection of civilians agenda in profound crisis, as States prioritize military objectives at the expense of civilian welfare. Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine is characterized by attacks against Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure designed to terrorize the population into submission, including heinous sexual violence against both male and female victims and survivors.

The attacks by Hamas against Israeli civilians on 7 October, including sexual violence and hostage-taking, demonstrated a callous disregard for the principle of distinction. The response by the Israeli Government has inflicted yet further civilian suffering. While we commend the adoption by the Council of resolution 2728 (2024), we deplore its lack of implementation and continue to remind all States that the resolution is binding under Article 25 of the Charter. Further action by the Security Council to protect civilians and to bring about an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian ceasefire is urgently needed.

Liechtenstein reiterates that all military action must strictly comply with international humanitarian law, including by respecting the principles of distinction and proportionality at all times. We strongly regret the increasingly prevalent narrative present across the region that aims to blur the distinction between combatants and civilians. Liechtenstein supports the work of the International Criminal Court, which is of vital importance for the protection of civilians agenda at a time when international humanitarian law is routinely, and at times systematically, violated by conflicting parties.

Liechtenstein is horrified by the widespread civilian harm described in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/385) in a range of further situations, including the Sudan, Syria and Myanmar. We note that the widespread use in armed conflicts of explosive weapons in populated areas is a particularly disturbing trend in the violation of international humanitarian law. We call upon all States that have not yet done so to sign the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and to fully and effectively implement it.

A major element of resolution 1265 (1999) is the prevention of conflicts that endanger international peace and security, and, in that context, the use of appropriate preventive measures, including all three pillars of the responsibility to protect. Clearly there is room for improvement in that area, for example, through enhanced cooperation between the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Peacebuilding Commission. We hope that the Pact for the Future can take important steps forward in that direction.

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

**Mr. Videche Guevara** (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica thanks you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate and the Secretary-General for his report (S/2024/385).

As we commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the addition of this topic to the Council's agenda, we must reflect on what it means to protect civilians. In that regard, Costa Rica wishes to make three observations.

First, Costa Rica, as a member, along with Ireland and Norway, of the troika on the issue of explosive weapons in populated areas, will host the upcoming conference on the follow-up to the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We call for more States to adhere to and implement the Declaration, and we believe it is crucial to collect data on the use and impact of such weapons, to keep records of victims disaggregated by age, gender and disability, and to collect information on the types and effects of such munitions when they are deployed in urban areas, including against critical infrastructure and essential services. In that regard, the Council should include the issue of the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas into debates on women and peace and security. Costa Rica also believes it is imperative to adopt a gender perspective in the application and interpretation of international humanitarian law.

Secondly, Costa Rica wishes to highlight the great risk to the protection of civilians posed by the presence of mines and other explosive devices, even decades after conflicts end. Those explosive devices not only represent a humanitarian and security risk, but also have an impact on the development prospects of affected communities. Therefore, significant advances in humanitarian demining, explosive ordnance risk education and victim assistance have the potential to contribute directly to broader efforts in the humanitarian, development and peacekeeping domains. Therefore, aligning the fight against mines and other explosive devices with peacekeeping mandates is a concrete step towards peace and sustainable development.

Thirdly, while Costa Rica shares the need to declare critical infrastructure off-limits to malicious cyberoperations, it is imperative to go further. For Costa Rica, the protection-of-civilians agenda must be updated to encompass cyberactivities affecting the civilian population. My country reiterates its call for civilian data to enjoy the same protection as all other civilian objects and for the ensuring protection against operations that disable cyberinfrastructure or inhibit its functionality.

In a time of worsening global trends and geopolitical tensions, Costa Rica urges the Council to work in all areas —diplomatic, political, and operational — to achieve greater respect for international humanitarian

law so that it is authentic, effective, rigorously impartial, neutral and independent.

The protection of civilians is an inescapable responsibility and cannot be treated as an option. Those who fail to meet that obligation must be held accountable before international justice. Respect for international humanitarian law must become a priority.

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

**Mr. Feruță** (Romania): The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Security Council's agenda on protection of civilians in armed conflict, as well as the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, point to the need for more vigorous attention and action from all of us.

There is a shocking civilian toll of armed conflicts, including for young girls and boys that are being abducted by parties to conflict around the world or hostages kept by terrorist organizations. This is also a consequence of acts of defiance of, and non-compliance with, international humanitarian law. We cannot be complacent in that regard.

The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is both a moral and strategic matter for Romania. As stressed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/385), prevailing disrespect for international humanitarian law by some States and non-State armed groups, as well as pervasive impunity for violations, have become critical challenges. Our principled position is that there is no alternative to holding accountable those committing violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Placing the protection of individuals at the centre of the humanitarian response is a priority for my country. We have been doing it in Ukraine for the past two and a half years, by supporting Ukrainian refugees who sought protection on our territory, or by supporting United Nations activities. We have a solid and efficient cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross in that regard. Just recently we signed a joint document. We see that collaboration as essential for the promotion of humanitarian values.

With similar emphasis on dignity and humanitarian values, last week my Government authorized for Romanian food supplies to be included in the first European Union aid shipment to Gaza civilians via the maritime corridor. Romania will continue to

provide humanitarian aid to support civilians in need and to lend support to advance the implementation of the mandate of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Ms. Sigrid Kaag. My Government also decided to resume its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Finally, I would like to reiterate my delegation's commitment to strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict worldwide, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law — in particular the Geneva Conventions.

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

**Ms. Rodríguez Mancía** (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala thanks Mozambique for convening this open debate in the framework of the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a milestone in recognizing that the protection of civilians in conflict situations is an international security responsibility.

It is extremely alarming that the number of civilian deaths in armed conflict has increased by 72 per cent in less than two years, that four of 10 civilians killed are women and three of 10 are children. That trend reflects the vulnerability of those groups and the urgent need to adopt specific measures to protect them.

We are at a crucial moment — we must resolutely address one of the greatest threats to civilians in armed conflict: the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas or in indiscriminate attacks, which is a clear violation of international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles of humanity, proportionality and distinction. We must remember that behind every statistic there are human lives, shattered families and entire communities devastated.

We stress the urgency for States to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and to take effective measures to prevent and respond to violations. The protection of civilians must be an absolute priority in all our actions and decisions.

Moreover, the security environment of the Organization's peacekeeping missions is increasingly volatile and requires a readjustment of Council mandates in order to meet real needs, especially those related to

the protection-of-civilians mandate. It is necessary for the actors involved, in particular the troop-contributing countries and the United Nations Secretariat, to review the rules of engagement.

It is also necessary to recognize the importance of integrated, coordinated and broad approaches, taking into account assessments of the threat of violence against civilians in the operational planning and decision-making processes that determine when and where the capabilities of a peacekeeping operation will be deployed, as well as in the General Assembly's assessment of the mandate and in the Fifth Committee, where the necessary resources must be approved.

Seventy-five years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the responsibility to protect must be recognized as the fundamental way to protect populations from mass atrocities and must be strengthened, particularly in the light of new hotspots of tension with similar prevailing patterns, leading, in the worst case, to the commission of new crimes against humanity.

The New Agenda for Peace urges us to come together in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation in order to address the global challenges we face. We must work together to protect civilians in conflict and build a safer and more peaceful world for all.

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

**Mr. Mythen** (Ireland): Ireland aligns with the statements delivered, respectively, on behalf of the European Union and its member States, and on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

As the Secretary-General's 2024 report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385) articulates, preventing and mitigating civilian harm is an imperative in any and all situations of armed conflict. That primarily requires strengthened compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as accountability. The report also encourages other responses to address the full range of possible civilian harm, even where parties to conflict claim to be in compliance with the law.

In the 25 years since the Council first formally considered the protection of civilians, the situation has deteriorated globally, especially in recent years. However, the progress we have made with the

development of our toolkit for protecting civilians provides some hope. If this toolkit is fully utilized and fully built upon, the international community can do much better.

I will refer to four examples in that regard.

First, the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas is a vital tool, through which we can improve the protection of civilians and reduce civilian harm. Following Oslo, the next conference on explosive weapons in populated areas, to be held in Costa Rica, will be a critical opportunity to advance that objective. Given the critical situations unfolding in the Sudan, Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere today, the need for urgent action is all too clear.

Secondly, at the national, regional and global levels, much more needs to be done to deliver on the potential of resolution 2417 (2018) as a means of reversing the rising scourge of conflict-induced food insecurity. Unhindered humanitarian access and the protection of civilians and food infrastructure must always be ensured. Accountability and better use of anticipatory action are essential in that regard. As the famines looming in Gaza, the Sudan and elsewhere are essentially human-made, they can — and must — be stopped.

Thirdly, given the rate of drawdowns of United Nations peacekeeping and political missions, and their implications for humanitarian access and protection, renewed consideration needs to be given to building on resolution 2594 (2021) on United Nations peacekeeping transitions and its provisions on the protection of civilians. In that regard, we must strengthen and institutionalize our approach to support for United Nations mission transitions.

Fourthly, resolution 2664 (2022) crucially reformed United Nations sanctions regimes by providing for a humanitarian exemption within all such regimes. The resolution has already had a positive impact on humanitarian action. It is essential that States and relevant organizations continue efforts to ensure its full implementation. It is also essential that the Security Council decide in the coming months to extend the application of the resolution to the counter-terrorism sanctions regimes. Those steps can help us to continue to address the unintended negative consequences and impacts that sanctions can have on humanitarian activities.

We will address the questions of conflict and hunger, explosive weapons in populated areas and United Nations transitions further with partners through side events at our Mission this week.

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

**Mr. Vasconcelos** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mozambique for convening this important debate to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999). We also thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385).

Mexico is participating in this debate as it is deeply concerned about the trends reflected in the report, as it documents, among other aspects, that civilian deaths increased by 72 per cent from 2022 to 2023, affecting primarily women and children. Moreover, sexual violence in conflicts increased by 50 per cent in the same period.

It is against that backdrop that Mexico would like to contribute to this debate with the following comments.

First, the conflicts have a disproportionate effect on civilians and vulnerable groups; the cycles of hostilities of various armed conflicts have been extended; and the main victims are largely civilians. The burden of war affects the most vulnerable and those who are not able to defend themselves.

It is concerning that the escalation of the conflict in the Sudan and the hostilities in Israel and Gaza in 2023 and this year have led to a dramatic increase in civilian deaths. For example, in five weeks alone, the number of deaths in the occupied Palestinian territory was equivalent to nearly 60 per cent of the total number of civilians killed worldwide in 2022.

In our region, the uptick in violence in Haiti has led to the displacement of the population. Once again, women and children are disproportionately affected.

Secondly, Mexico is grateful for and pays tribute to the humanitarian work undertaken by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations around the world. We express our strongest condemnation of attacks on humanitarian personnel, wherever they occur.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, we reiterate our call on the parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate the urgent and uninterrupted flow of

humanitarian aid to the affected areas, including water, food, medicine and fuel. We unequivocally reject the obstruction of humanitarian aid to those who need it most.

To ensure unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, it is essential that the sanctions imposed by the Council not have adverse effects on humanitarian work. For Mexico, resolution 2664 (2022) is a step in the right direction.

Thirdly, Mexico insists on the importance of complying with the legal framework for the protection of civilians. The compendium of thematic resolutions adopted by the Security Council in the past 25 years strengthens the obligations derived from the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Protocols Additional.

The adoption of further political declarations also underscores the international community's commitment to humanitarian law. Of particular note in recent years is the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. However, it is undeniable that there is a crisis in the implementation of those standards. The Council has a key role in calling for compliance with applicable international law, even in times of peace.

Finally, it is also not enough to point out serious violations committed against civilians in armed conflicts. As war crimes and crimes against humanity, those acts must not go unpunished. There must be consequences for the perpetrators of those acts to make accountability a reality. In that regard, the French-Mexican initiative on the restriction of the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities can be a first step to prevent them. We invite those who have not yet done so to join the 106 States that have signed that initiative.

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

**Mr. Prabowo** (Indonesia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. I also thank the briefers for their insights.

Today we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), a milestone in civilian protection in armed conflict. Nevertheless, 25 years on, profound challenges remain in upholding humanitarian principles in conflict. The state of civilian protection remains grim, as we are faced with alarming questions

such as: Why do we fail to protect civilians in Gaza, with more than 35,000 women and children killed? Why do we continue to witness civilians being deprived of water, food and other basic needs and humanitarian workers targeted?

Indeed, while the resolution has advanced legal and normative frameworks for civilian protection, much remains to be done to ensure that measures to protect civilians are implemented and all mechanisms work effectively. That requires identifying areas where the Security Council must step up its efforts.

In that regard, I wish to highlight three important points.

First, full adherence to international law and international humanitarian law is the cornerstone of civilian protection. All parties to conflict must uphold that principle and adopt robust mechanisms for accountability. There must be no double standards in the implementation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. It is vital in gaining trust with all parties, including the host countries, and the international community which will lead to the effective protection of civilians.

Secondly, we must stop the politicization of humanitarian assistance. The Security Council must be firm in supporting safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance, while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host countries. The Council must ensure that assistance is well-targeted, taking into account the particular needs of women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as the protection of humanitarian workers. Greater engagement with local populations by peacekeeping missions, including through soft diplomacy, is important to create effective communication and ensure that the missions can exercise the mandate to protect civilians.

Thirdly, we must promote a comprehensive approach in the protection of civilians. Our discussion today must have real meaning for civilians affected by war. In that regard, we must be mindful that the full protection of civilians requires concerted effort from all stakeholders. Greater synergy among the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries and United Nations bodies, including the United Nations agencies on the ground, is crucial to ensure that all measures, as mandated, are implementable.

Let us not just commemorate with words on paper but translate them into actions that save lives and uphold dignity. The time for rhetoric is over. Now is the time for decisive action.

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

**Mr. Gómez Hernández (Spain)** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mozambique for convening this debate and the briefers for being here today.

Spain endorses the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Conflict and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect. In a national capacity, I add the following reflections.

Humanitarian diplomacy is one of the priorities of Spain's foreign policy. As may be seen from our humanitarian diplomacy strategy, the protection of civilians is at its core. Therefore, Spain is committed to conflict prevention and resolution, respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian action, and the protection of people in situations of vulnerability.

This year, as we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians on the agenda of the Security Council and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, we note with concern that the state of the protection of civilians is resoundingly bleak, as the Secretary-General points out in his annual report (S/2024/385). In 2023, the United Nations recorded at least 33,443 civilian deaths in armed conflict, an increase of 72 per cent as compared to 2022. Those deaths are particularly serious when it is a question of humanitarian workers, as is the case of Spanish aid workers María Hernández and Emma Igual, who lost their lives while carrying out humanitarian work to help the local population in Ethiopia and Ukraine, respectively. Their deaths and those of so many other humanitarian workers must not go unpunished. In that context, we welcome Switzerland's initiative to introduce a draft resolution on the protection of humanitarian workers.

The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians notes that more than 700 medical workers were killed in attacks in 2023, a huge increase over the 174 killed in 2022. That is unacceptable. We call for compliance with resolution 2286 (2016), on the



protection of hospitals, ambulances and medical workers in conflict, which was initiated by Spain in 2016. The protection of medical aid workers during armed conflict, which has unfortunately become particularly relevant in the current humanitarian contexts in Ukraine and Gaza, has been a priority of our humanitarian policy for several years and has been the chosen theme for our 12-month chairmanship of the International Committee of the Red Cross's Donor Support Group (DSG), which we have held since June 2023. Two policy forums and a field mission to Colombia have been held during our chairmanship of the DSG.

The report also shows how women and children remain particularly vulnerable. The proportion of women and children killed doubled and tripled, respectively, as compared to 2022. Four out of 10 civilians killed in conflict in 2023 were women, and three out of 10 were children. In addition, women and girls continue to be particularly exposed to sexual violence in conflict — 95 per cent of cases last year, according to the report of the Secretary-General. It is therefore essential to support preventive approaches and strengthen women's participation in decision-making processes, including mediation and resolution of armed conflicts, in line with the women and peace and security agenda.

Attacks against schools and teachers not only continued but increased in 2023. We will continue to promote support for the Safe Schools Declaration to increase the number of signatories and encourage all countries that have not signed to do so. We also encourage all States that have not yet done so to align themselves with the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We must incorporate the Declaration into the practice of our armed forces to ensure the effective protection of civilians in conflict.

The protection of civilians has become one of the central issues on the agenda of the Council, permeating all its work. However, as we see in Gaza and Ukraine, the majority of the victims of armed conflict continue to be civilians. We must act urgently to strengthen and ensure respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law, especially in the conduct of hostilities, to effectively protect civilians in situations of armed conflict.

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

**Ms. Melikyan (Armenia):** We thank the Presidency of Mozambique for convening this open debate on the agenda item "Protection of civilians in armed conflict" and for the aide mémoire provided (S/2024/359, annex). We thank the briefers for their valuable contributions to our debate today.

International humanitarian and human rights law continue to shape the framework for the effective protection of the civilian population. Armenia attaches the utmost importance to full compliance by all parties to conflicts with the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, without any preconditions. Attempts to isolate the population residing in conflict areas from humanitarian relief efforts or from the application of international humanitarian law under political pretexts should be identified and addressed by the international community.

Armenia reiterates its steadfast position on the prevalence of justice and accountability. We are constantly reminded that impunity for past crimes can lead to the most serious violations in the future, the ultimate manifestations of which are genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has a key role to play in consolidating international efforts and prevention mechanisms through the effective monitoring of grave human rights violations and assessing the risks of potential atrocities.

Identifying early warning signs and enhancing accurate reporting capacities of the United Nations and its relevant structures and departments is crucial for countering systematic policies to spread hate speech and the incitement to, and glorification of, violence based on ethnicity or religion, in particular when such policies are State-led. In that context, it is highly regrettable that the recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385) failed to adequately reflect the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh and the ethnic cleansing of 120,000 people from their ancestral homeland.

The aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and its devastating consequences have been widely discussed on several occasions in this Chamber. Our strong belief is that the humanitarian

catastrophe could have been prevented had the United Nations and the Council acted effectively and resolutely in addressing the starvation of the entire population caused by the illegal blockade of the transport corridor and the instances of extrajudicial killings, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment of the civilians.

On 22 September 2023 the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide issued a statement on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh stressing that

“[m]ilitary action can only contribute to escalate what is already a tense situation and to put the civilian population in the area at risk of violence, including risk of genocide and related atrocity crimes.”

Violations of humanitarian law by Azerbaijan have been documented by various international humanitarian and human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations Committee against Torture in its recent concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Azerbaijan, adopted on 6 May 2024. The expert opinion of the former International Criminal Court Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo and the reports of the first United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Professor Juan Méndez, circulated as official documents of the Security Council (S/2023/642, S/2023/826), elaborated extensively on well-planned ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has a critical role in protecting civilians during armed conflicts. As an impartial, neutral and independent organization, the ICRC has a unique mandate under international humanitarian law to provide protection and assistance to victims of conflict. The release and repatriation of Armenian prisoners of war and hostages remains an urgent humanitarian issue.

The United Nations and the Security Council have a crucial role in protecting civilians during armed conflict. By pursuing justice for the victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity, we reaffirm our commitment to the universality of international humanitarian law and human rights law, thereby upholding the dignity and safety of every civilian caught up in situations of armed conflict.

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

**Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria):** Bulgaria aligns itself with the statements to be made on behalf of the European Union and by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

I would like to further emphasize a few points in my national capacity.

I would like to thank Mozambique for convening today's debate and the briefers for their insightful and sobering remarks.

Bulgaria welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) and its recommendations. The report clearly shows that war is devastating lives throughout the world and that civilian deaths increased by 72 per cent in 2023 compared to the previous year. A total of 7 out of 10 recorded deaths occurred in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel, making it the deadliest conflict for civilians in 2023 owing to the escalation that followed the 7 October 2023 attack by Hamas. Widespread civilian harm is also taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Sahel region, Somalia, Syria and Ukraine, and the list could go on.

In 2023, an unprecedented number of humanitarian workers and medical personnel made the ultimate sacrifice while helping those in need. It is of deep concern that, when nowhere is safe, the emblems of the United Nations and of the Red Cross can no longer provide protection, and as a result vehicles, shelters and hospitals become — deliberately or by accident — the targets of military attacks. Humanitarian workers are not only facing extreme threats, but their work is often hampered by political considerations and bureaucracy. Civilians in populated areas fall victim to explosive weapons, homes and schools are destroyed and hunger is used both as a method of warfare and as an unintended consequence of war that drives displacement. Damage to critical civilian infrastructure deprives people of energy and safe water, prevents the distribution of food and services and causes environmental degradation and pollution. One such example is the hazardous material that entered the Black Sea owing to the destruction of the Kakhovka dam.

As we have witnessed time and again, women, children and people with disabilities are the ones who are most affected when rules are not followed by the parties to conflicts, and they are also the ones who were

often subjected to sexual violence at elevated levels during 2023.

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, the difficult truth is that legal norms and political commitments are largely overlooked and therefore undermined by States and non-State actors involved in conflict. That can be avoided by strengthening compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law at home. Legal, institutional and operational measures to prevent harm should be enacted at the national level, focused on the type and the effects of the harm that civilians experience in conflict, on recourse to redress and on holding perpetrators and States accountable for their violations against civilians. The Security Council also has a special role in urging parties to conflict to respect the rules of war, to engage in political dialogue and to train forces on protecting civilians.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), our path to a holistic approach to the protection of civilians in armed conflict is still incomplete, and our understanding of the full range of civilian harm in contemporary and future conflicts is evolving. Our ability to deliver better protection will only be reinforced if we take a moment to recognize and pay tribute to the work and the commitment of the International Committee of the Red Cross as the guardian of the Geneva Conventions and if we recommit to peace as the most effective protection and to accountability and reconciliation as the best guarantee against relapse into conflict.

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

**Mr. Rwamucyo (Rwanda):** I appreciate the insightful briefings by the briefers who spoke earlier and the other Member States that have spoken in this Chamber.

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on the protection of civilians. At a time when civilians have come to represent an ever-rising proportion of victims in ongoing conflicts, the debate underscores the pivotal importance of discussing the efficiency of our current peacekeeping operations and mechanisms. Rwanda strongly believes that the protection of civilians is best achieved through the prevention of armed conflicts

in the first place. Anything short of that treats the symptoms and not the root causes of conflicts.

Primarily, we urge Member States to address the root causes of conflict, such as hate speech, genocidal ideologies, bigotry, discrimination and divisive political policies and rhetoric, to prevent potential atrocities and human suffering.

Mr. Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda, stated in September 2014,

“When lives are at stake, nothing matters more than saving them. Protection of civilians should be the ventral purpose of peacekeeping. So long as peacekeeping is necessary, it should be timely, focused and effective. Working together, we can reach that point.”

We acknowledge that the primary responsibility of the protection of civilians lies with host nations. However, in the absence of will and capability on the part of the host nations, United Nations peacekeeping should bridge the gap in accordance with the rules of engagement. That requires a unified understanding of the protection of civilians among peacekeeping partners. Having differing interpretations and understanding undermines the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations and will continue to have lethal consequences for civilians.

Recently, we have witnessed an increase in the intimidation of civilians, stigmatization, xenophobic and inflammatory rhetoric, genocidal ideology and political manipulation, in many cases calling for the killing and extermination of targeted segments of communities in areas in which peacekeeping missions are deployed. That must not be tolerated and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. We believe that accountability for such atrocities is important in order to stop the endless cycle of violence.

In 2015, Rwanda introduced the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. That framework included 18 principles aimed at addressing the most relevant aspects of peacekeeping, including assessment and planning, force generation, training and equipping personnel, performance and accountability. Powered by the memory of our past, the Kigali Principles reflect Rwanda's hope to right the wrongs of global security mechanisms by putting civilians trapped in violence first. Since their inception, we have diligently upheld those principles, becoming the fourth largest United

Nations peacekeeping contributor with troops who continue serve with distinction in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic.

It is in that regard that I would like to share the success of the Kigali Principles to underscore three areas of improvement that can allow us to uphold our agenda.

First, the protection of civilians, wherever mandated by the Security Council, should be a priority for United Nations peacekeeping operations. That is severely hampered without the remarkable work of uniformed and civilian peacekeeping personnel. It is imperative that we provide that personnel with the much-needed resources and support to implement the brave work of protection efficiently and successfully.

Secondly, the Security Council, as the primary body tasked with maintaining international peace and security, should focus on the root causes of conflicts, including colonial legacies, genocidal ideologies and hate speech, to find viable political solutions. Rwanda believes in political approaches that are inclusive, peaceful and sustainable in nature to enable conflict resolution and work towards preserving innocent lives. Any partial efforts towards such a political approach may not be viable and may come at a high human cost.

And thirdly, when lives are at stake, nothing matters more than saving them. The protection of civilians should be the central purpose of peacekeeping; the mandates we fulfil may be multi-complex, but the protection of a life in the face of violence is not. We urge Member States to carry out peacekeeping operations with proactive ideals and generate the best practices needed for the protection of civilians across the missions we serve.

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

**Mr. Soberón Guzmán (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*):** We welcome Mozambique's presidency of the Security Council.

While this open debate on the protection of civilians is taking place, the murder of civilians in the Gaza Strip, including women, children and refugees under the United Nations flag, is skyrocketing, as is that of aid workers and United Nations personnel. The violence that has characterized the Israeli occupation

for more than seven decades persists, along with its colonizing practices and its apartheid policy in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The offensive against Rafah — in addition to the indiscriminate attacks against the population in Gaza, the destruction of homes, hospitals and civilian infrastructure and the deprivation of the population of essential services — together set the scene for the considerable deterioration of the precarious humanitarian situation resulting from the blockade of the Strip, genocide and collective punishment, in flagrant violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, including international humanitarian law.

We reiterate our demand for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the illegally occupied Palestinian territories, in order to put an end to the collective punishment and to the war crimes and crimes against humanity that are being committed with impunity by Israel with the complicity of the United States Government.

The Security Council cannot stand idly by in the face of the massacre that is under way. The forced displacement of Palestinians from the land, which by right belongs to them, must be stopped. The delivery of urgent and sufficient humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people must be guaranteed. In that endeavour, we advocate for unrestricted support for the extraordinary humanitarian work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We call for strict adherence to General Assembly resolution 78/251, entitled "Proposed programme budget for 2024: section 26, Palestine refugees", which was submitted by our delegation on behalf of the Group of 77 and China in 2023 and was supported by the vast majority of Member States.

In the face of the United States persistent obstruction of the Security Council option, we urge members to consider urgently sending to the Gaza Strip an international protection mission, authorized by the General Assembly, with the mandate to contribute to the security and protection of the civilian population and to facilitate the delivery of emergency humanitarian aid, including water and food.

The root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be addressed without delay. It is urgent that the Security Council enforce its own resolutions in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian

territory, including East Jerusalem, and to guarantee the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent and sovereign State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and in which the refugees' right of return is also guaranteed.

The admission of the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations cannot wait another minute. The international community clearly expressed its will in that regard in the General Assembly on 10 May (see A/78/PV.49). We call on all the peoples and the Governments of the world to unite their voices in every forum and to call tirelessly for an end to the brutal massacre against the Palestinian people. Humanity must prevail over barbarism.

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

**Mr. Mainero** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate Mozambique on its presidency of the Security Council and on convening this important open debate.

It is imperative that the Security Council remain committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Twenty-five years after this issue was first considered by the Security Council, we note with concern that the state of the protection of civilians throughout 2023, as reported by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2024/385), was utterly bleak. The United Nations recorded more than 30,000 civilian deaths in armed conflict last year, a 72 per cent increase as compared to 2022. We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and we appreciate its recommendations and conclusions. Hostilities and the use of explosive weapons in urban contexts, attacks on critical infrastructure, the use of anti-personnel mines and the use of private military companies are some of the behaviours that exacerbate risks to the protection of civilians and that the Secretary-General's report clearly identifies.

Argentina would like to emphasize once again the value and significance of the Geneva Conventions and their two Protocols Additional. After humankind witnessed the horrors of the Second World War, States universally agreed on those instruments in order to reflect universal values of ethical behaviour. The Geneva Conventions and their two Protocols Additional represented a notable step forward in the normative evolution of international humanitarian law,

expanding its scope. Today they remain the cornerstone of contemporary international humanitarian law. They contain the essential rules that protect persons who do not participate, or who are no longer participating directly, in hostilities when those persons find themselves in the hands of an adverse party. Those persons are the wounded and sick, castaways, prisoners of war and civilians.

The basic notion underlying the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional is the notion of respect for the life and dignity of the individual. Those who suffer in conflicts must receive help and attention without distinction. Those instruments also confirm and strengthen the role of medical missions. Medical personnel, units and transports must be respected and protected in all circumstances. That is an indispensable condition to be able to collect and care for the wounded and sick. The principles on which those rules are based are as old as armed conflicts themselves.

An important element in the protection of civilians is the investigation of the facts and accountability for those responsible for crimes against civilians. In that regard, we consider it appropriate to point out that international humanitarian law offers a tool to investigate events that could constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions by an impartial entity, namely, the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission provided for in the first Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions. Argentina would also like to highlight the fundamental role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the fight against impunity. Recourse to the ICC is a key tool in the quest for justice, and it is often the Security Council that holds the key to access to the Court.

More than 20 years since the adoption of the first Security Council resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, civilians continue to represent the vast majority of conflict victims. The problem lies not in the current normative framework, but in the translation and implementation of those norms in practice. In order to translate the normative advances of the past 20 years into demonstrable results, the Security Council, and the international community as a whole, must advocate for more robust implementation of the existing normative framework. The protection of civilians agenda cannot move forward without a genuine commitment to respecting international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. The United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council

must redouble their efforts to strengthen conflicting parties' compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law and to ensure accountability for violations.

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

**Mr. Rae (Canada)** (*spoke in French*): I thank and congratulate Mozambique for organizing this open debate.

This year marks an important stage for the protection of civilians. It is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. It is also the twenty-fifth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians on the Security Council's agenda. Canada is proud to have worked with its partners to bring this issue before the Council in 1999. Since then, the Council has taken concrete steps to protect civilians. It has implemented sanctions, travel bans and assets freezes. It has introduced tools to protect children and combat conflict-related sexual violence. It has referred situations to the International Criminal Court. Peacekeeping operations have been given solid mandates to protect civilians. But the words of the great philosopher Pascal are still with us,

“Justice without force is powerless; force without justice is tyrannical”.

And, we could add, such force is total chaos, as we see in many places all over the world.

(*spoke in English*)

We have to read the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/385) and question what progress we have made and our ability to live up to the ambitions of the Charter of the United Nations. The civilian death toll in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, particularly of children and women, is completely unacceptable. In Ukraine, Russia is waging an illegal war of aggression, as determined by the International Court of Justice, bringing untold suffering to civilians. And yet, it goes on and on and on. Warring parties in the Sudan have committed atrocities against civilians and, as we speak, are besieging starving communities in Darfur. In Myanmar, the junta and other forces continue their campaigns of violence — bombing schools, hospitals and villages and denying aid. As we speak today, in just the past few days the village of Buthidaung was burned to the ground by the Arakan army in Rakhine state, and there are now thousands of Rohingya who are, once again,

on the road looking for places to live, as they have lost their place to live. War is being waged with blatant disregard for civilian well-being and for civilian life.

When we assess the combined impact of deep poverty, unrelenting climate change and levels of violence not seen in generations, we must all understand that children and women are paying the highest price. They are the most likely to die, to be wounded and maimed, to be left unhoused, hungry, starving and without access to education and work. Yet, we cannot leave them without care and without help.

The primary responsibility for changing this behaviour lies, first of all, with the parties to conflict. But we must also realize that the Council and the United Nations, the Organization that has been charged with addressing these situations, has a special responsibility. To restore trust, Council members must lead the way in implementing the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report.

Canada believes that we must urgently improve humanitarian access. Parties to conflict must allow rapid and unimpeded access to those in the greatest need. That is clearly not happening now. Aid cannot be conditioned on political outcomes. Civilians must never pay the price for failed political negotiations. None of these things are supposed to be optional, but rather obligations under international humanitarian law. That means that the law is broken every day. The Council can and must do more to compel parties to safeguard and preserve the humanitarian space. We strongly welcome Switzerland's leadership on a draft Council resolution on this issue.

Over the past 25 years, we built an architecture to protect and assist civilians in armed conflict. Today we have to appreciate that this architecture is under immense stress. The weight of that disintegration and collapse is borne not by us in New York, but by the civilian men, women and children who are living through what can only be called the hell of conflict.

That is why the Council acted as it did 25 years ago — to prioritize protection for the most vulnerable. And that is exactly why the Council and all States must recommit to meet our obligations to the Charter, to international law, to ourselves and to the people we serve through the United Nations. Let justice and its enforcement finally be bound together into our common future.

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

**Ms. Pavļuta-Deslandes** (Latvia): At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to Mozambique for convening this discussion on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of landmark resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also extend our gratitude to all briefers for their insightful contributions.

International humanitarian law stands as the cornerstone of civilian protection and defines the rules of war. For 75 years, the Geneva Conventions have served as a powerful guardian of non-combatants during armed conflict. However, we are witnessing a rise in the open violation of those rules. The international community must respond decisively to any non-compliance with these fundamental laws. International law and international humanitarian law are absolutely clear — civilians must be protected at all times.

As we speak, devastating humanitarian crises are unfolding in Gaza, Ukraine, the Sudan and other places. More than 35,000 Palestinians, including women and children, have perished, and the remaining residents of Gaza continue to face life-threatening danger. Hostages taken by Hamas's 7 October attack remain in captivity. In Ukraine, more than 10 million people have been displaced and more than 10,000 civilians have been killed. Intentional attacks on Ukraine's critical infrastructure by Russia are specifically aimed to harm civilians by cutting access to electricity, heating and other vital amenities. With violence escalating in the Sudan, millions face critical food shortages and displacement, highlighting the urgent need for civilian protection and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Let me be clear, the deliberate targeting of civilians, sexual violence, rape and torture are war crimes, which demand justice and accountability. The international community cannot stand idle. What needs to be done?

First and foremost, violations must be deterred, and perpetrators must be brought to justice, including in international courts. Accountability must be swift and decisive. We must ensure that no civilian victim is neglected.

Secondly, the media plays a critical role in ensuring accountability. By documenting the war's devastating human cost and giving a voice to civilians caught in

the crossfire, journalists are becoming targets. We must steadfastly defend their right to free and independent reporting. Their safety is paramount in ensuring accountability for war crimes.

Thirdly, all crimes against civilians, including conflict-related sexual violence, must be documented and investigated. Victims deserve justice and have the potential to lead peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. In order to prevent the recurrence of crimes, it is also crucial to build the resilience of the most vulnerable groups — women, children and persons with disabilities.

Fourthly, we need to address structural factors that lead to civilian suffering in conflicts. In that regard, we highlight the challenges posed by arms trafficking, especially illicit flows of small arms and light weapons. We believe that the upcoming fourth Review Conference of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects provides an opportunity to step up our efforts in this field. As Vice-President of the Conference, Latvia will also contribute to its substantial outcome.

In conclusion, let me underline that a shared global understanding of the rules of war and the fundamental principle of protecting civilians is crucial. Education, particularly of future generations, holds the key to building a safer world. Latvia remains committed to working together with all Member States for peace and resilience.

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

**Mr. Hachem** (Lebanon): At the outset, allow me to offer our deepest condolences to the brotherly people and Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the tragic passing of His Excellency President Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian and the other victims of the crash.

I wish to congratulate your country, Mr. President, Mozambique, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month and to express our gratitude to Malta for its assumption of the presidency last Month.

We thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate on the vital matter of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and on the relevance of the related international legal architecture. It is of particular importance, as we mark 75 years since the 1949 Geneva

Conventions and 25 years since the adoption of landmark resolution 1265 (1999). It is particularly timely — and I should add, unfortunately — as this is happening in one of the darkest times in our history, a time in which every single principle of international humanitarian law is being violated, a time in which every single provision of the Geneva Conventions and its Protocols Additional is being trampled on. It is yet another attempt to continue to blatantly shred every major international legal norm seeking to preserve humankind and protect civilians. The Secretary-General puts it bluntly in his most recent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385) — the current state of the protection of civilians is overwhelmingly tragic.

Since 8 October, Lebanon has been the victim of yet another aggression by Israel, an aggression that has targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure. Israel has killed so far more than 80 civilians, including 26 women, 14 children, three journalists and 18 health workers. It has injured more than 1,000 civilians. It has displaced more than 93,000 civilians. It has targeted health facilities. It has forced 72 schools to close. It has damaged thousands of hectares of agricultural land. It has damaged nine water facilities. It has repeatedly bombed southern Lebanon with white phosphorus in populated areas. It has caused irreparable damage to agricultural land and forest and has destroyed the livelihood and revenue sources of tens of thousands of families in the south.

Many of the crimes that we have just listed fall under the umbrella of war crimes, according not only to us but also to many independent sources, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. A report of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon found that an Israeli tank killed Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah last October by firing at a group of clearly identifiable journalists in violation of international law. Amnesty International confirmed that those Israeli strikes were a direct attack on civilians that must be investigated as a war crime. Moreover, Amnesty International stressed that the Israeli attack on the town of Dhayra, a populated civilian area, using white phosphorus must be investigated as a war crime, because it was an indiscriminate attack that injured at least nine civilians and damaged civilian objects. Those are just a few examples of the magnitude of the crimes being committed by Israel against us on a daily basis.

One is compelled to ask these questions. How many more complaints should we send to the Council to stop

Israel from committing its daily violations and crimes? How many more lives should be lost before the atrocities stop? How many more lands and critical infrastructure should be destroyed before it is enough? How much time do we have to wait for justice to be served?

Despite all that has been said, despite all the killings, sufferings and sacrifices, Lebanon still believes in a diplomatic solution based on the Charter of the United Nations. We remain fully committed to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety, and we thank all countries that have been playing a major role towards de-escalation, especially the United States of America and France. We come here, once again, to stress that Lebanon does not wish to have a confrontation, does not seek an escalation and does not want war.

The Lebanese people want sustainable solutions, stability on their borders and prosperity in their country.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mrs. Samson.

**Mrs. Samson:** I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

In the interest of time, we will publish the full version of this statement on our website.

For 25 years now, the Security Council has been discussing the protection of civilians as an important part of international peace and security. Yet during that time, conflicts have proliferated and become more complex.

The European Union pledges to improve its work to prevent human suffering, alleviate existing suffering and maintain human dignity. To prevent suffering, we must be proactive. Ultimately, to prevent suffering from conflict, we must prevent conflicts. When prevention fails, strict and full compliance with international law is non-negotiable, including international humanitarian and human rights law. Compliance must include the international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, as well as non-reciprocity. Parties to armed conflict must adhere to international humanitarian law in their choice of methods of warfare and consider the direct and indirect civilian and environmental impacts.



The EU remains deeply concerned by the use and humanitarian consequences of explosive weapons in populated areas and welcomes the continued work on the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We also emphasize the need to implement the responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocity crimes.

Climate change can cause displacement and food insecurity and exacerbate conflicts, so the EU is committed to protection through resilience-building. That includes investing in disaster risk reduction measures, strengthening early warning systems and scaling up anticipatory and early action.

To alleviate suffering, all parties to conflict and all States concerned must allow and facilitate rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, in line with international humanitarian law and the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. International humanitarian law prohibits depriving civilians of supplies essential to their survival and the targeting of humanitarian and medical workers.

As reliable partners and key donors, the EU and its member States will continue to support the United Nations-coordinated international humanitarian response. However, to do so, adequate resources are needed. We call for increased contributions from others, including the private sector and international financial institutions, and more efficiency, including nexus programming.

To maintain dignity, we must end impunity for international humanitarian law violations that amount to war crimes or other crimes under international law. The decisions of international courts and tribunals must be respected and implemented, with a particular emphasis on placing the victims and survivors at the centre of judicial action. We recognize that women and girls and persons with disabilities continue to find themselves in a vulnerable situation in conflicts, and we will promote their participation in humanitarian decision-making.

The EU is also committed to people-centred approaches to protection, localization and strengthening humanitarian diplomacy.

As we continue to plan for the challenges ahead, including with the negotiations on the Pact for the

Future, we must not miss any opportunity to prioritize the protection of civilians.

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

**Ms. Al-Thani** (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We congratulate your friendly country, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council. We commend you for your wise management of the Council's work. We also thank the briefers for their valuable contributions and welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385).

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

The protection of civilians in conflict is one of the top priorities for the State of Qatar. We have adopted a clear strategy in that regard and have started significant and ongoing international efforts to prevent conflicts and mitigate their impact. We have also engaged in mediation and peacebuilding efforts in the region and the world, in line with our strong commitment to international law, international humanitarian law and especially the four Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, which have been incorporated into the national legislation of the State of Qatar.

A century after the adoption of legal provisions on the protection of civilians, the world is still witnessing a constant increase in conflicts in different regions, which have changed in nature and frequency and also in terms of their catastrophic humanitarian impact on civilians, especially women and children. Furthermore, we have witnessed a broad and dangerous disregard for the legal frameworks on the protection of civilians worldwide. The effectiveness of international law and international humanitarian law are truly being put to the test. The clearest example of that is the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip that has been going on for more than seven months. That aggression has resulted in the worst humanitarian catastrophe suffered by our Palestinian brothers. The Israeli occupation continues its aggression against unarmed civilians in the Gaza Strip, using policies of forced displacement, starvation and collective punishment and targeting humanitarian relief and medical workers. It continues its threat of launching a broader military operation in Rafah in flagrant defiance of the international community's will.

In that context, the State of Qatar condemns in the strongest terms the bombarding of Rafah by the Israeli occupation forces, storming the land crossing and threatening to forcibly displace citizens from their shelters and homes. We call upon the international community to urgently prevent the offensive against Rafah, prevent genocide from being committed and provide full protection of civilians in line with international law and international humanitarian law. We warn against the forced displacement of civilians, which is a serious violation of international law.

The State of Qatar calls on the Council to shoulder its responsibilities and implement its resolutions on Gaza, the most recent of which is resolution 2728 (2024).

In order to protect civilians, the State of Qatar continues its relief and humanitarian efforts to save the lives of our brothers in the Gaza Strip. In November 2023, the mediation efforts of the State of Qatar, in cooperation with the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United States of America, succeeded in reaching a temporary humanitarian truce that resulted in the release of dozens of prisoners and detainees on both the Palestinian and the Israeli sides. Furthermore, we sent relief convoys that contributed to the protection of civilians in the Strip. In that regard, we remain committed to making efforts to reach a permanent and immediate ceasefire in Gaza to ensure the release of more prisoners and detainees, the delivery of more humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians.

In conclusion, the State of Qatar underlines the strong link between the protection of civilians and the prevention of conflicts. We believe that the protection of civilians must be considered at the Summit of the Future, to be held in September. We also stress the need to prioritize the protection of civilians in the 2025 review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, and we reiterate our call not to use the veto in situations of atrocity crimes and gross violations of human rights.

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

**Mr. Lagatie** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mozambique for this debate and the briefers for their presentations.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and the statements to be delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends on the

Protection of Civilians and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

As we commemorate important milestones this year in the protection of civilians, we must face the damning reality that the demands contained in Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians remain largely unfulfilled. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385) is clear: the number of civilian victims of armed conflict continues to rise, with a particularly chilling increase among women and children. Similarly, sexual violence has also risen by 50 per cent. Behind the figures, human lives are being shattered, and entire societies are having to rebuild. I would like to honour the memory of those who unjustly lost their lives, and I express my solidarity with the families of the victims and pay tribute to the resilience of the survivors.

In recent months, Gaza has become a symbol of the issues surrounding the protection of civilians. Since the barbaric attacks of 7 October 2023, the Palestinian population has been the main victim of Israel's military offensive. Despite successive Security Council resolutions, we are witnessing an escalation in violence and violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

We must also be mindful of the tragic consequences of other conflicts, in particular in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A few weeks ago, we condemned in the strongest possible terms the bombing of a camp for displaced civilians near Goma. We also denounce the recent advances of the Rwandan-backed Mouvement du 23 mars and the increase in sexual and gender-based violence committed by that group. We are awaiting the joint report of the Congolese Government and the United Nations on the follow-up to the drawdown of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That transition must not create gaps in the protection of civilians.

The war in Ukraine also continues to have disastrous consequences for the Ukrainian population, despite the resolution of 23 February 2023, adopted by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly (General Assembly resolution ES-11/6), which calls for constant care to spare the civilian population and civilian objects, and for a cessation of attacks on critical infrastructure. In the light of the intensification of Russian attacks against civilian targets in recent months, I would like to remind Russia that it must comply with its obligations and respect international law.

The list goes on — whether in Syria, Yemen or the Sudan, too many examples remind us of the critical state of civilian protection. Even one civilian victim is one too many. We must redouble our efforts to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and human rights by the parties to the conflict and to ensure that those responsible for violations are held to account. I would also like to reiterate the vital importance of women's participation and leadership in protection mechanisms.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the work of humanitarian actors. I would like to reiterate Belgium's confidence in the United Nations as the guarantor of an international order based on the rule of law, in which the protection of civilians must play a central role.

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

**Ms. Lassen** (Denmark): On behalf of the Nordic countries — Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Denmark — I thank Mozambique for the opportunity to address the Council at this open debate during Protection of Civilians Week, and I thank the briefers for their interesting perspectives.

As has been mentioned many times here today, we are seeing an alarming disrespect for the rules of international law, including international humanitarian law. In a number of situations, including in the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sahel, we are witnessing a pattern of grave civilian harm. In Gaza, the conflict between Hamas and Israel following the 7 October 2023 terrorist attack has resulted in a catastrophic humanitarian situation with severe effects on civilians, particularly children, as well as the imminent risk of famine. In Ukraine, continued Russian attacks against civilians and civilian critical infrastructure, including through the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, are causing immense human suffering. In many conflict situations, humanitarian and medical workers continue to be threatened and targeted.

We echo the calls contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) for an urgent recommitment to international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations and to deliver actual protection of civilians on the ground. Let me highlight three important elements in that regard.

First, a comprehensive implementation of international humanitarian law is needed. The adaptation of military manuals and the implementation of civil harm mitigation policies, weapons reviews and measures that facilitate and allow safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access during conflict are all important ways to further compliance with international humanitarian law. The strong focus on compliance by duty-bearers should be complemented by a focus on the harm experienced by people in war zones and efforts to strengthen the self-protection strategies and agency of conflict-affected people. The effective protection of civilians and civilian objects must be made a strategic priority in the planning and conduct of military operations.

Secondly, the harm inflicted upon civilians when hospitals are bombed or electricity infrastructure is destroyed should not be written off as mere unintended consequences of war. We therefore welcome initiatives that provide a more nuanced understanding of how patterns and types of harm affect different groups, and we support concrete suggestions and initiatives on how to minimize such harm in an effective way. The recent Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the Safe Schools Declaration are examples of such initiatives. We encourage Member States to endorse and implement those instruments.

Thirdly, a re-energized effort to apply international humanitarian law anywhere and everywhere is needed. Today is an important opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to the basic principles of international humanitarian law and to reaffirm their relevance and applicability. Humanitarian law and human rights law apply to everyone, everywhere, whether in the streets of the Sudan or Gaza, the suburbs of Kharkiv or cyberspace.

This year marks 25 years since the Security Council first recognized the protection of civilians as a matter of international peace and security, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Let us use this occasion to mobilize for the full and effective protection of civilians in armed conflict.

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

**Ms. Zacarias** (Portugal): Let me start by thanking the briefers for their inputs and views and

by congratulating Mozambique for convening today's very important debate, knowing that this issue holds special significance for Mozambicans in the light of the situation in the Cabo Delgado province. Mozambique is taking concrete and positive steps to protect civilians in that region, namely, through its Interministerial Commission on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, and Portugal is proud to be supporting those efforts, both bilaterally and through the European Union.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and the statement to be made on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Both statements underline that, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) and on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the protection of civilians faces bleak prospects. Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, the Sahel region, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine and Gaza have cast a dark shadow on the international community's ability to ensure strict adherence to, and respect for, the most basic human rights and international humanitarian law. From conflict-induced hunger to attacks on humanitarian workers, from explosive weapons in populated areas to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, civilian lives continue to be severely harmed, deprived of the most basic needs and far too often subjected to violence.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on this subject (S/2024/385) sums up the situation with a grim conclusion: the full protection of civilians remains a distant goal. While the full responsibility and accountability of States and parties to conflicts must remain cornerstone principles in this discussion, we need stronger accountability mechanisms, and we need practical and meaningful action to prevent violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and to address impunity whenever such violations and abuses occur.

There is vital urgency in rethinking what it takes to protect human lives today, in the light of increasingly complex and interconnected threats. The forthcoming Pact for the Future is an excellent opportunity for all of us to recommit to the protection of civilians. In doing so, we should look at the recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in his New Agenda for Peace. We should look at emerging areas, namely, regarding

new technologies and autonomous weapons. We should strengthen the regulatory framework on private military and security companies. And we must not forget about the climate-peace-security nexus.

As subscribers to the Safe Schools Declaration and the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, we welcome and fully support the waypoints towards the full protection of civilians presented in the report of the Secretary-General. We further encourage the Secretariat and the Security Council to make use of technological developments, such as data analysis, early-warning systems and predictive models, in order to make the action of peacekeeping missions more effective in fulfilling their mandates on the protection of civilians. We must swiftly identify which solutions can be duly scaled up and properly funded.

In conclusion, let me add a special word to honour all those humanitarian workers and peacekeepers who have perished while seeking to be the most humane of human beings and those who continue to risk their lives when trying to protect the most vulnerable and to overcome the constraints on humanitarian assistance. I thank them.

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

**Mr. Van Schalkwyk (South Africa):** I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999). We also thank the briefers for their informative and sobering insights and their recommendations on this important topic.

It is pertinent to note that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Security Council's consideration of the protection of civilians coincides with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 — a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. We are marking that anniversary in the context of deteriorating global peace and security and the appalling harm inflicted on civilians across the world's conflict zones that traverses all regions. We must ask the question: what have we accomplished since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians, a quarter of a century ago?

The Security Council has discussed at length the impact of transgressions of international law by parties to conflicts in the context of the resolutions it has adopted. The lack of unanimous Security Council decisions has illustrated the adverse impact that that has on addressing conflict situations, and consequently on the integrity of the Council. The selective application of international law and the hypocrisy and double standards displayed by some Member States have resulted in the unfortunate situation of prolonged conflicts and civilian suffering. Let us honestly ask ourselves: do we believe that some civilians should warrant more protection than others? Are lives in some parts of the world worth more than others? Going by the action and words — or rather the inaction and silence — in some cases it appears so. The horrific events of the ongoing war on the people of Palestine in Gaza have resulted in thousands of casualties, including Palestinian civilians, journalists, humanitarian and United Nations personnel. It has also resulted in forced displacements, the use of starvation as a weapon of war and a higher rate of child deaths than in any other conflict in the past decade. Such utter disregard and violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law cannot go unchallenged.

It is in that context that South Africa approached the International Court of Justice again on 16 May, amid the intensified offensive in Rafah and a humanitarian crisis beyond measure, to seek urgent provisional measures in addition to the provisional measures granted by the Court in January and March, which have been ignored by the State of Israel. As the primary organ of the United Nations charged with the mandate to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council is empowered by the Charter of the United Nations to take concrete action to address such situations. It has become evident that parties to conflicts will continue to disregard their obligations for as long as the Security Council does not enforce its decisions.

Today's important open debate presents us with a moment to reflect on the serious ramifications of the inability or unwillingness to act when required to do so. We reiterate that the culture of impunity and disregard of international law by powerful States and those that they support politically, militarily and financially has often laid bare the basis of those kinds of actions. Let us be clear today: if we are really serious about the protection of civilians, no one should be above the law.

For civilians to be protected in conflict situations, there must be peace. The proliferation of war and the arming of warring parties will result in more civilians being killed. The global community must unite in its commitment to prevent and address the root causes of armed conflict, including addressing global development challenges and ensuring the protection and well-being of civilians caught in the crossfire.

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

**Mr. Hilale (Morocco):** I have the honour of delivering this statement as Co-Chair of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, which consists of 55 Member States and the European Union.

This year marks both the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of the protection of civilians in armed conflict agenda and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Despite the international community's continued commitment to protecting civilians from human rights violations and atrocity crimes, today we bear witness to a continuing and pervasive degradation of respect for civilian lives and an appalling disregard for the norms and laws that the international community established to alleviate the effects of armed conflict.

The results are tremendous human suffering and a high risk of atrocity crimes. More than 114 million people are currently displaced because of conflict, atrocities and persecution worldwide, with disproportionate impacts on women and girls. Children make up a substantial number of the persons displaced as a result of conflict, and 2023 is likely to see the highest number of abuses against children in the 25 years of the protection of civilians agenda. In 2023, the United Nations recorded at least 33,443 civilian deaths in armed conflicts, a 72 per cent increase compared to 2022.

In the light of those horrendous figures, it is important to recall that at the 2005 World Summit, all Heads of State and Government affirmed that each State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with the Charter, to protect populations.

While today's debate provides an important opportunity to mark progress on protecting civilians, the Security Council should also acknowledge that a widening gap between legal obligations and practice jeopardizes progress on all protection agendas and leaves civilians at increased risk of atrocity crimes. The human suffering caused by those setbacks and failures compels us to consider how to prevent, protect and generate the will to respond more effectively. It is in that context that the Group of Friends would like to stress the following points.

First, full and effective compliance with international law is fundamental to the protection of civilians. All parties to conflicts are obligated to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as applicable, and those responsible for violations should be held accountable, including in relation to conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence.

Secondly, Member States should take meaningful action at the national and international levels to improve the protection of civilians in conflict, including by reviewing and implementing policies, guidelines and practices relating to civilian harm mitigation, and by ensuring that policies on arms and ammunition transfers take into account the risk of such transfers contributing to violations of international humanitarian law or of States' international human rights law obligations.

Thirdly, it is of the utmost importance that States put in place appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to comprehensively address violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and to provide justice for victims and survivors, including by holding those who commit such violations and abuses accountable.

Fourthly, while the number of people who are in dire need of humanitarian assistance across the world continues to grow dramatically, the humanitarian system is overwhelmed, overstretched and critically underfunded, and humanitarian aid workers are carrying out life-saving work in increasingly complex and dangerous environments. While the international community continues to struggle with access and with the ability to provide assistance, Member States should urgently respond to United Nations humanitarian appeals, increase predictable, innovative, flexible and adaptive funding, and build partnerships with local and decentralized aid structures.

Far too many civilians are killed in both direct and indiscriminate attacks in today's complex and protracted conflicts. The international community should make every effort to assist civilians caught up in those conflicts. The members of the Security Council should take timely and decisive action aimed at ending and preventing atrocities, and not hinder credible efforts to that end. We note in this context the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group and the French-Mexican initiative on the suspension of the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities. Women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in conflict resolution negotiations and decision-making processes should be considered as a means to attain and sustain peace and security for all.

Finally, the surest way to protect civilian populations is by investing in the prevention of conflict and the peaceful settlement of disputes, on the basis of the principles of justice and international law.

*(spoke in French)*

Allow me to add the following points in my national capacity.

First, the Kingdom of Morocco, whose King, His Majesty King Mohammed VI is the Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, reiterates its demand for an immediate, durable and verifiable ceasefire in Gaza, and for the uninterrupted, sufficient and unimpeded flow of food aid to be allowed. Morocco underscores the need to guarantee the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers, in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law, and to liberate all prisoners and detainees. Moreover, my delegation rejects the imposition of new facts on the ground in the Gaza Strip and the attempts to forcibly displace Palestinians. In that regard, the Kingdom of Morocco stresses that the threat to extend military operations to encompass the territory of the Gaza Strip in its entirety, including Rafah, is unacceptable. The Kingdom of Morocco insists on the obligation to open a political horizon for the Palestinian question that will make it possible to relaunch the two-State solution, with an independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Secondly, under the enlightened leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Morocco has always been steadfast in its efforts to promote peace and security in its regional and international environment.

That commitment is embodied, *inter alia*, by Morocco's substantial contribution to peacekeeping operations, as one of the longest-standing and largest troop-contributing countries in Africa and worldwide, with more than 75,000 members of the Royal Armed Forces deployed in the context of the 15 United Nations peacekeeping operations on every continent since 1960. Morocco has established itself as a provider of excellence for the training of troops, particularly in the context of the triangular partnership between the United Nations and its Member States.

Thirdly, the Kingdom of Morocco has always advocated for the success of all peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts to include the socioeconomic activities such as economic revitalization, the empowerment of women and youth employment, the development of infrastructure and access to essential services, including sanitation services, drinking water and health care. The protection of civilians should be included in a holistic approach for an integrated resolution of conflict situations, taking into account their specificities, political environment and underlying causes.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that the tireless commitment of Morocco to the values of mutual coexistence and the rejection of hate speech and intolerance is firm and unwavering. Morocco is proud to have backed resolution 73/328, on hate speech, adopted by the General Assembly in 2019. That resolution was the first United Nations to combat the phenomenon of hate speech. Morocco is also proud to have supported resolution 75/309, adopted in 2021, which declared 18 June as the International Day for Countering Hate Speech.

Moreover, recent resolution 77/318 further highlighted the exacerbation of the cycle of violence and instability, which is a serious threat to peace and security in many regions of the world and a threat for civilian populations, in particular, as affirmed by His Majesty King Mohammed VI at the fifteenth session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in Banjul on 4 May,

“we are extremely concerned about the rise in hate speech, which is claiming growing numbers of victims”.

His Majesty King Mohammed VI also stated,

“we have every hope that the resolution initiated by the Kingdom of Morocco and adopted unanimously by the General Assembly on 25 July 2023, on combating hate speech, will make it possible to make a qualitative leap forward in the fight against the phenomena of extremism and hate speech”.

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

**Mr. Szczerski (Poland):** I will be brief. Let me begin by thanking Mozambique for organizing this important debate. I express my appreciation to all the briefers for their thought-provoking contributions.

As we commemorate 25 years since the Security Council adopted resolution 1265 (1999), its first resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, it is very unfortunate that instead of taking this opportunity to mark progress in strengthening the protection of civilians, we are faced with the dark reality of today's conflicts, where deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure became an inherent part of the military operations, not just collateral damage. That has gone hand in hand with open disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In other words, instead of marking progress, we are witnessing regressing.

Compliance with international humanitarian law, which — at least in theory — enjoys universal acceptance, should not be controversial. And yet, a very disturbing picture emerges from the Secretary-General's report on the state of protection of civilians in armed conflict in 2023 (S/2024/385). Thousands of civilian deaths and injuries, destroyed homes, attacks on basic civilian infrastructure, refugee crises — these are the horrific consequences of the armed conflicts around the world.

Poland is deeply concerned about the worrisome trend of increased attacks on humanitarian workers, medical personnel and journalists. Humanitarian help cannot be provided without safe access and safe working conditions that are in line with international law.

Effective protection demands greater focus on persons in vulnerable situations, including women, children, youth, persons with disabilities and internally displaced persons, as they suffer disproportionately from the most devastating consequences of armed conflicts.

Despite that obvious fact, according to the Secretary-General report, in 2023 more than 11,000 children were killed or maimed. Ukrainian children are abducted and forcibly displaced to the territory of, or occupied by, the Russian Federation. The destruction of schools and hospitals constantly deprives them of their right to education and health care.

Poland is involved in helping civilian populations in conflict zones. As a close neighbour, we are focused on helping Ukraine and its civilian population to stay strong against Russia's brutal aggression. We currently host one of the largest communities of war refugees from Ukraine. We operate as a hub for transferring international humanitarian aid, and we deliver Polish humanitarian assistance in Ukraine.

In the Middle East, just last year, Poland channelled €7 million of humanitarian and development assistance, mostly via United Nations and by delivering medical aid for Egyptian hospitals treating patients from Gaza. Recently, Poland contributed an additional \$1 million for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and \$1 million for the World Food Programme in order to address the food needs of Palestinians. We also made a donation to Jordan in the form of over 700 parachutes, to be used for humanitarian airdrops to Gaza.

Against that backdrop, we must push more for universal compliance with international humanitarian law. We need to do justice to the fundamental values of Geneva Conventions and remember that the duties of States parties also extend to ensuring their respect. We therefore expect that Security Council members, as States parties to the Geneva Conventions, will act to respect and ensure respect of international humanitarian law whenever and wherever it is violated.

We also stress the importance of conflict prevention, on the one hand, and ensuring accountability and fighting impunity, on the other. Investing in resilience-building; promoting economic and sustainable growth, as well as good governance and democracy; meeting the goals of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — those are the cornerstones to enhance the protection of civilians on a long-term basis.

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

**Mr. Greco (Italy):** Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union

and the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

We express our gratitude to the Mozambique presidency for convening this crucial open debate.

As we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, it is imperative to evaluate the current state of civilian protection. Conflicts worldwide have proliferated and become increasingly complex. The Secretary-General's latest annual report (S/2024/385) indicates a staggering 72 per cent increase in civilian deaths in 2023, compared to the previous year. The proportion of women and children in the most recent period has doubled and tripled, respectively. The impact of conflicts on civilians is particularly acute when fighting occurs in populated areas and involves the use of explosive weapons. Attacks on critical infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and homes have heightened the risks for civilians. Additionally, climate change and natural disasters are exacerbating the suffering. The manner in which hostilities are conducted, along with the obstruction of humanitarian access, is contributing to unprecedented levels of hunger.

Italy reiterates its commitment to upholding the rule of law, humanitarian principles and international law, as well as protecting human rights and dignity for all individuals, as endorsed in the most recent meeting of Foreign Ministers in the framework of Italy's Group of Seven presidency. Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law is central to the agenda of protecting civilians. All parties to conflict must ensure rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. International humanitarian law prohibits depriving civilians of supplies essential to their survival and targeting humanitarian and medical personnel.

Let me focus on two specific aspects of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, the role of peacekeepers in the protection of civilians remains of the utmost importance. Over the years, Italian peacekeepers have developed a successful model based on respect for local culture, impartiality and close engagement with the civilian population. While there is no one-size-fits-all model, we believe that the specific training received by both Italian and



non-Italian peacekeepers on the protection of civilians has been a crucial asset wherever they have operated.

Based on our national experience, it is essential to promote preparedness for the protection of civilians among troop- and police-contributing countries and to foster a mindset centred on professional, targeted predeployment training. To date, approximately 600 United Nations peacekeepers from 35 countries have received focused training on the protection of civilians at the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units. That effort will continue.

Secondly, recognizing food security as a long-standing priority, Italy is resolutely committed to addressing this critical and multifaceted issue. Conflict has remained the primary driver of food crisis since 2018, each year affecting, on average, around half of the total population, which suffers from acute food insecurity. In fact, armed conflicts lead to the disruption of food systems and markets, an increase in food prices and the displacement of people and livestock. Moreover, food insecurity can represent an immediate danger to the survival of the affected civilians. As host country of the Rome-based United Nations food agencies and as Chair of the Group of Friends of Food Security and Nutrition here in New York, Italy is dedicated to maintaining high levels of attention on that vital matter.

The international community must intensify its efforts to create a safer and more dignified future for all civilians affected by conflicts worldwide. Let us seize every opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the full respect of the law in armed conflicts. Italy stands ready to do its part.

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

**Mr. Thapa** (Nepal): I thank the delegation of Mozambique for convening today's open debate. I also thank the briefers for their remarks.

It is appalling to see that civilian casualties have increased by 72 per cent this year, with 40 per cent of the casualties being women and 30 per cent, children.

Despite the pious intent to protect civilians better, we have not been able to translate our intentions into actions. We continue to witness unprecedented conflict-led humanitarian crises.

In today's multidimensional conflicts, the use of indiscriminate warfare and the possible abuse of

new technologies, including artificial intelligence, have presented further challenges to the protection of civilians. Additionally, current geopolitical rivalry has exacerbated the overall peace and security architecture, negatively impacting the protection of civilians.

Nepal strongly condemns the indiscriminate attack on civilians and civilian infrastructure by all parties to conflict. Those who promote an indiscriminate and disproportionate attack on the civilian population and civilian objects should be held accountable. We emphasize that all parties to a conflict should respect international humanitarian law and human rights laws and ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian agencies.

The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host State. However, the United Nations and humanitarian agencies should support the States that lack the capacity to protect. Effective protection should involve a holistic approach, including political solutions, prevention and peacebuilding strategies, humanitarian support, peacekeeping and community engagement and ownership, among others.

Currently, as the largest troop- and police-contributing country, Nepal deploys professional peacekeepers who are well-versed in the concept and the execution of the protection-of-civilians mandate. We have implemented a thorough vetting process, dedicated predeployment and in-theatre training. Punitive measures are inflicted on those convicted of human rights violations or sexual exploitation and abuse cases.

To best deliver on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping, we need proper strategies, national ownership, political solutions, community engagement, communication and a whole-of-mission approach supported by adequate financial and human resources.

Nepal's own experience of a nationally led peace process emphasizes inclusive policies and participatory State architecture to maintain social harmony and avert threats.

In conclusion, we emphasize addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, exclusion and the violation of human rights. Preventing or ending conflicts is the ultimate protection of civilians.

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

**Mrs. Kamboj** (India): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this high-level open debate today.

The surge in armed conflicts around the globe in recent years has led to devastating consequences, severely impacting civilian populations. India has expressed its concern over the conflict in Ukraine, as well as in Gaza, which have led to a large-scale loss of lives, especially among women and children. The protection of civilians across the globe in such conflict situations, in our view, rests on the pursuance of dialogue and diplomacy as the only way forward.

Let us look at the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. The conflict in Ukraine has had a destabilizing effect, with broader regional and global implications. It has had a disproportionate impact on the global South and developing countries. The humanitarian consequences of such armed conflicts are particularly severe. We are witnessing, for instance, the debilitating effect that conflicts can have in gaining access to humanitarian aid. In Gaza, with the humanitarian crisis deepening, we have sought the protection of civilians and reiterated the need for the safe, timely and sustained supply of humanitarian assistance to the people of Palestine.

Such violence not only claims lives but also severely hampers efforts to deliver essential humanitarian aid to those in desperate need. As we witness the profound impact those conflicts have on access to aid, the call for peace and effective humanitarian assistance becomes increasingly urgent. We have strongly called for respect for international law and international humanitarian law by everyone under all circumstances.

It is crucial to note that, while international law and principles set the ground rules for navigating around armed conflicts, placing a significant responsibility on all the parties involved, the fundamental duty to protect the safety and security of populations primarily lies with national Governments. There can be no substitute for national efforts in creating an environment where civilians are secure. We have also seen that in contemporary conflicts solutions often lie in the political and social domains and not just in security, calling thereby for creative and conducive conditions for local political and social processes to take hold.

Exacerbating the social tensions is also the threat of terrorism being faced today, which is pushing societies towards instability and violence. Therefore, any debate on the protection of civilians must address the destruction caused by terrorist groups, especially

those supported by State actors with political agendas. To that end, the international community needs to stand firm in its opposition to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reject any attempt to provide any justification for terrorist acts.

As we discuss multipronged solutions for the protection of civilians, we also need to acknowledge the limitations and shortcomings of our peacekeeping missions, which are rooted in the ever-expanding scope of mandates incommensurate with the resources allocated and inadequately equipped to meet the challenges on the ground. That has propelled India to call repeatedly for realistic mandates, backed by adequate resources and predictable and sustainable financing, and with the involvement of all parties concerned, including host nations and troop- and police-contributing countries, which stands to reason.

It is unfortunate as well that the decisions on the handling of those conflict situations are taken without the involvement of the State concerned. The Security Council, which decides on the fate of those many disturbed regions, does not have equitable representation from the very countries mired in conflict situations. Given the role that the Security Council plays in efforts towards the resolution of conflicts and for sustaining peace and being the institutional architecture primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council cannot, in our view, remain frozen in time. It needs to evolve to avoid obsolescence and irrelevance. One of the most important requirements is therefore to strengthen the capacity of the Council by making it representative of contemporary realities and by undertaking reforms to make it more effective through an expansion of membership in both the permanent and the non-permanent categories.

The need of the hour, as I conclude, therefore is a holistic approach, coordinated action and a clear strategy that can ensure the protection of civilians, rooted in representative and inclusive governance structures reflecting gender sensitivity and inclusivity.

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

**Mr. Marschik** (Austria): I thank you for convening today's open debate, and I thank the briefers for their remarks.

Austria aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and to be delivered

by Norway on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians. I would like to add the following in our national capacity.

Twenty-five years ago, resolution 1265 (1999) noted a bleak picture, stating “civilians account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts and are increasingly targeted by combatants and armed elements”. Twenty-five years later, the Secretary-General has just reported that the state of the protection of civilians in 2023 was resoundingly grim (see S/2024/385). On an almost daily basis, we receive reports about civilian casualties in different regions around the world. Therefore, it is profoundly clear that more needs to be done for the protection of civilians. Permit me three points in that regard.

First, the Security Council has an important role to play in condemning violations of international humanitarian law, wherever they occur. International humanitarian law binds all parties to armed conflict, under all circumstances. That is a red line, and it is non-negotiable. Perpetrators of violations must be held accountable. The Security Council needs to do its part in ensuring that.

During Austria’s previous membership in the Security Council, it placed particular emphasis on the protection of civilians and, in fact, under Austria’s presidency of the Council, resolution 1894 (2009) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict was adopted in November 2009. We are pleased to note that that resolution is still recognized and referred to and has, also, been built upon and used since its adoption.

Secondly, more than 90 per cent of civilian casualties are caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. That is unacceptable and clearly needs to change. The Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, endorsed by 86 States thus far, offers a concrete toolbox to make that change. We should take seriously the call of the Secretary-General in the New Agenda for Peace to implement the Declaration and establish mechanisms to prevent, mitigate and investigate harm to civilians and ensure the accountability of perpetrators. We call on all States to endorse the Declaration. In January, Austria convened the first Vienna military workshop on the implementation of the Declaration, the report of which is available to inform future work. Austria

remains committed to further engage on all aspects of implementation, including military policy and practice, data collection and analysis, humanitarian access and victim assistance.

Thirdly and finally, we have come a long way since the protection of civilians mandate in United Nations peacekeeping was introduced 25 years ago. Austria fully supports the principles outlined in the Declaration of Shared Commitments on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and the implementation priorities of Action for Peacekeeping Plus. Tailored, context-specific peacekeeping approaches to protecting civilians, emphasizing the protection of women and children in those contexts, are essential. Austria will remain a reliable partner to ensure that the discussions on the future of peace operations will also include that issue as a humanitarian priority.

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

**Ms. Michail (Cyprus):** My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and wishes to make some additional remarks in a national capacity.

Seventy-five years since the universal ratification of the Geneva Conventions and 25 years since the first Security Council debate on the protection of civilians (see S/PV.3980), we are still witnessing outrageous violations of international humanitarian law on a daily basis. A recommitment to respecting international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and strengthened compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law are urgently needed.

In addition to upholding the prohibition of the use of force and ensuring a ceasefire, the Council must use all other tools at its disposal for the protection of civilians. In that regard, my delegation would like to raise the following points.

Humanitarian conditions in Gaza continue to worsen. Given its geographical proximity, and in line with resolution 2720 (2023), Cyprus, in coordination with humanitarian partners and other countries, initiated the establishment of the Cyprus maritime corridor initiative, which outlines a mechanism for securely delivering significant quantities of assistance from Cyprus to Gaza via sea. That maritime corridor

is part of a sustained effort to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza through all possible routes.

The number of forcibly displaced persons around the world continues to grow, with a record-breaking 110 million in 2023. Situations of prolonged displacement are of great concern, and we firmly believe that the Council can take more robust action to ensure the right of return as soon as possible, respect for the property rights of those displaced and a prohibition on settling other populations in areas of forced displacement. Cypriots experienced those things as a result of foreign aggression and therefore have a first-hand knowledge and understanding of the profound disruption of those phenomena on civilian lives.

The issue of missing people and its humanitarian nature should not be overlooked. The number of individuals who are missing owing to conflict is remarkably high. Families have a right to know the fate of their loved ones. The anguish experienced by family members is profound, and their suffering intensifies with time. Enhanced international cooperation frameworks are needed. We urge the Council to build upon resolution 2474 (2019) and to incorporate stronger provisions in its resolutions, especially in cases in which the fate and whereabouts of missing persons remain unknown for decades, such as in the case of Cyprus.

Before closing, allow me to refer to the inseparable connection between peacekeeping and the protection of civilians. Sixty years ago, the Council adopted resolution 186 (1964), which authorized the establishment of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). As we commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the creation of UNFICYP, we pay tribute to those who have lost their lives while serving in Cyprus and, through them, to the troop-contributing countries. We are grateful to the United Nations for 60 years of service in the name of peace in Cyprus. Its presence is required until a lasting settlement is reached, ending foreign occupation and reuniting the island and its people.

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

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): I begin by thanking Mozambique for organizing today's open debate on the protection of civilians. Ghana associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect and is grateful to the briefers for their insightful perspectives, which come at

a critical time for civilians and humanitarian workers in several parts of the world, including Gaza, the Sudan, Ukraine and Myanmar.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Council's first thematic resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, resolution 1265 (1999), civilians and civilian infrastructure, together with humanitarian staff, are witnessing unprecedented perils as a result of violent conflicts. In line with our collective pledge in the Charter of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, we must advance the goal to contribute to a safer and more humane world.

As was the case 25 years ago, the world is still faced with an alarming number of civilian deaths, untold human suffering and psychological trauma resulting from violent conflicts. The gendered nature of the violence has too often manifested itself in the use of sexual exploitation of women and girls as a weapon of war. As we have seen too many times, the suffering of civilian populations is worsened by the deliberate destruction of essential civilian infrastructure and livelihoods. To be credible, the international community must hunker down and stay the course of its responsibility in ensuring the protection, dignity and welfare of all civilians, as well as the safeguarding of all civilian infrastructure during times of armed conflicts.

In addressing today's open debate, Ghana would like to make three key points.

First, reflecting Africa's commitment to the protection of civilians in conflict, as has been exemplified in regional responses to conflict in Africa, such as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the African Union and the United Nations must proceed with the implementation of resolution 2719 (2023) by building on prevailing best practices and evolving practices in a manner that ensures sustainability in the protection of civilians, mindful of the primary obligation of host States to safeguard their own civilian populations amid the difficulties that they encounter in mitigating the impact of violent acts of extremists, terrorists and other insurgency groups.

Secondly, there can be no better protection for civilians than avoiding conflicts altogether. Global efforts must therefore be made to prevent conflicts, end all forms of violence, ensure peace and stability and create conditions for the political resolution of

conflicts in line with the New Agenda for Peace. In that regard, the safeguarding of civilian lives should not be a reactive measure, but a proactive approach that leverages regional early-warning mechanisms.

Finally, Ghana holds that parties to conflicts who egregiously violate their obligations under international humanitarian law by impeding the delivery of aid and/or attacking humanitarian staff must be made to face the consequences of their actions. We believe that respect for international humanitarian law and other global conventions and treaties governing armed conflicts should be strengthened to forge a ring of protection around civilians in conflict and must encompass not only prohibitions against the deliberate targeting of civilian populations but also their safety and the preservation of their means of subsistence.

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

**Mr. Alrowaiei** (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the delegation of Mozambique for your efforts during your presidency of the Security Council for the month of May, which we appreciate, and for convening today's important meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. This meeting is to address the challenges and take stock of the progress made, in conjunction with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. I would also like to thank all the briefers for their valuable contributions.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385) refers to the current grim state of the protection of civilians around the world, which underscores the urgent need for parties to conflict to comply with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Furthermore, there is a need to adopt a comprehensive approach that takes into account the full extent of harm to civilians and civilian objects.

In view of the nature of the developments in the Gaza Strip, the thirty-third session of the Council of the League of Arab States held a summit, hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain on 16 May, and issued a statement on the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli attack on the Rafah crossing. It condemned Israel's continued aggression against the Palestinian city of Rafah, which has become a refuge for more than 1 million

displaced persons, and its resulting catastrophic humanitarian consequences. It also condemned the Israeli occupation forces' control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing aimed at tightening the siege on civilians, closing the crossing and ceasing the flow of humanitarian aid. At the summit, the Arab leaders demanded an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, an end to all attempts at forced displacement and all forms of siege, the facilitation of full and sustainable access to humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and Israel's immediate withdrawal from Rafah.

The Kingdom of Bahrain presented multiple initiatives that were adopted by the Bahrain summit, and which aimed at creating a secure and stable environment for all peoples of the Middle East and initiating a recovery phase for the region, including the following.

First, educational services must be provided for those affected by conflicts and disputes in the region, who have been deprived of their right to formal education owing to the security and political situation and the repercussions of displacement, asylum and migration, in cooperation and coordination with the League of Arab States, UNESCO and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Secondly, improve health care for those affected by conflicts and disputes in the region, develop the pharmaceutical and vaccine industry in Arab countries and ensure the availability of medicine and treatment, in cooperation and joint coordination with the League of Arab States, the World Health Organization and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain stresses the importance of intensifying efforts aimed at protecting civilians and reducing the effects of armed conflict on their lives, including through the development of preventive measures to ensure the safety, security and dignity of civilians during armed conflict and to meet the aspirations of the peoples of the world for peace, stability and development.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Ms. Mohammed.

**Ms. Mohammed:** I would like to commend Mozambique for choosing to use its presidency to reflect on the critical theme of the protection of civilians at a time when civilians in conflict contexts continue to experience unprecedented threats across

the world. Allow me also to thank all the briefers for their comprehensive briefings, which outlined some critical realities that we must confront to enhance ongoing efforts for the effective protection of civilians and other vulnerable groups.

Commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), adopted in September 1999, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 offers us the opportunity to renew our commitment to guaranteeing respect for international humanitarian law and human rights, which are cornerstones of sustainable peace. In that regard, allow me to reiterate the commitment of the African Union (AU) to the protection of civilians and underscore the need for it to be an integral part of the mandate of all AU peace support operations, pursuant to the AU Peace and Security Council communiqué adopted at its 326th meeting, held on 22 June 2012. The AU Peace and Security Council also further emphasized in its press statement adopted at its 775th meeting, held on 22 May 2018, that all peace support operations,

“should uphold the AU Protection of Civilians Principles and ensure broader compliance and accountability to international humanitarian law, human rights and conduct and discipline.”

I would like to further highlight four critical milestones reached by the AU as part of efforts to implement those AU Peace and Security Council directives.

First, the AU reviewed its 2010 draft guidelines on the protection of civilians and the 2013 aide-memoire and adopted a new protection-of-civilians policy that incorporated the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and contains 12 principles with clear roles and responsibilities for protection-of-civilians actors across the four pillars, namely, physical protection from violence, protection through political process, ensuring a protective environment and a rights-based approach to protection.

Secondly, I would like to underscore that the AU continues to enhance its Compliance and Accountability Framework, including establishing an AU-European Union-United Nations tripartite project that facilitates prevention, response and remedial actions at the headquarters and field mission levels in ensuring adherence to international humanitarian law, international human rights law and standards of conduct and discipline by peace support operations, including

approaches to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence against women.

Thirdly, the AU continues to facilitate training and ensure the signing of memorandums of understanding with all its troop- and police-contributing countries to guarantee their obligations to uphold all applicable standards of conduct and discipline when deployed in AU peace support operations. Within that context, the AU implements a robust accountability mechanism that includes in-mission court martials and home-country prosecutions of any personnel that violates AU conduct.

Fourthly, the AU has also documented lessons and good practices on how to ensure the effective implementation of human rights mandates and enhanced AU-United Nations coordination in specific contexts. Those critical milestones will continue to inform greater AU-United Nations partnership and cooperation in future AU-led peace support operations. In that regard, we will continue to work with our regional economic communities and regional mechanisms and with AU member States to ensure that robust protection of civilians efforts are adhered to at all times.

To conclude, permit me to reiterate once again the enduring importance of the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional in promoting human dignity and rights, even in the midst of conflict. While significant progress has been made since their adoption, ongoing efforts are still needed to address contemporary challenges and to ensure that those protections are effectively implemented and respected.

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

**Ms. Brattested** (Norway): I am honoured to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, a cross-regional network of 27 Member States.

We thank Mozambique for organizing this important debate, and we also thank the distinguished briefers for their presentations.

As mentioned by many, this meeting commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), which introduced the protection of civilians onto the Council's agenda, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. As we mark those significant milestones, we are keenly aware that the outlook is dire.

Across continents, we witness armed conflicts, with the killing and maiming of civilians, on an alarming scale. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is causing civilian harm in multiple ongoing armed conflicts. Schools, hospitals, homes and places of worship and cultural heritage are reduced to rubble. The numbers of missing and forcibly displaced people are increasing to record levels. Women and girls especially, but also men and boys, are exposed to conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence. Children are being abducted, recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups. The conduct of hostilities and the denial of humanitarian access are contributing to unprecedented levels of hunger and acute food insecurity. Climate change and natural disasters further worsen the plight of civilians in armed conflict.

The Group of Friends has three messages today.

First, more than ever, we as a global community must defend, protect and galvanize support for international humanitarian law. International humanitarian law is the fundamental legal framework for protecting civilians from the horrors of warfare during armed conflict. All parties to armed conflicts must comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law, in all circumstances. The perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable. Member States must put an end to impunity.

Secondly, more must be done to implement international humanitarian law, protect civilians against dangers arising from military operations and prevent civilian harm during armed conflict. The effective protection of civilians and civilian objects must be made a strategic priority in the planning and conduct of military operations. Towards that end, practical tools that ensure that protection is real and effective are very valuable. On that point, we welcome the recent Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the Safe Schools Declaration. We encourage Member States to consider endorsing those instruments.

Thirdly, the parties to armed conflicts must allow for and facilitate principled humanitarian action. Humanitarian personnel need safe, rapid, unimpeded, effective and sustained access to all persons in need. The Group of Friends is shocked by the many killings

of humanitarian personnel and medical workers. They are protected and must not be a target.

The most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent and put an end to armed conflicts. Clearly, that task falls primarily to the parties to the conflicts, but the Council also has a responsibility to maintain international peace and security. It cannot stand idly by when facing the outbreak of conflict and the use of force, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, and remain a credible custodian of world peace and order. A comprehensive approach to sustaining peace is important, and the Council cannot fail to act as mass atrocities unfold or parties to conflict commit serious violations of international humanitarian law. The Security Council must use its full toolbox to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. That includes strong protection of civilians components, as appropriate, in mandates for United Nations peacekeeping operations.

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

**Ms. Baños Müller** (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the presidency of Mozambique for organizing this annual debate on the protection of civilians and the representatives of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society for their briefings.

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first time the Council considered the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda (see S/PV.3977). We meet, however, against the backdrop of the escalation of numerous conflicts, with devastating consequences for the civilian population. Throughout 2023, hundreds of thousands of civilians died or suffered terrible injuries as victims of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks. The Organization recorded a 72 per cent increase in civilian deaths, compared to 2022. In 2023, 4 out of 10 civilians killed in conflict were women, and 3 out of 10 were children.

That is why El Salvador believes it necessary to reflect deeply on the meaning of the protection of civilians and about what can be done, from the United Nations, to prevent and mitigate their exposure to harm and suffering. El Salvador condemns in the strongest terms violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in armed conflicts. We call on all States and parties to conflict to respect

international law and to ensure accountability for any and all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The impact of conflicts on the civilian population has been particularly severe when clashes have taken place in populated areas and have involved the use of explosive weapons. We therefore encourage those States that have not yet done so to join the 87 countries that have endorsed the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the 119 countries that have signed the Safe Schools Declaration. We encourage States that have already done so to make efforts to implement those Declarations fully.

Conflicts were the main driver of acute food insecurity in 2023. El Salvador considers it absolutely unacceptable that hundreds of millions of people today are suffering acute food insecurity in countries or territories affected by conflict. We recall that the Security Council has repeatedly condemned the use of starvation as a method of warfare, and we call for civilians to be protected from the devastating effects of starvation in armed conflict.

The illicit trafficking and diversion of small arms and light weapons, their parts, components and ammunition have a direct impact on the protection of civilians. We therefore take this opportunity to highlight the importance of implementing effective national arms controls and of preventing the illegal manufacture, reactivation or conversion of small arms and light weapons, in particular in conflict situations. We believe that the effective implementation of marking measures, pursuant to the provisions of the International Tracing Instrument of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects for weapons in conflict, post-conflict and non-conflict situations, helps to prevent their diversion, mainly to unauthorized actors, and prevents the reuse and repurposing of weapons in other conflicts.

Likewise, we consider it crucial to fully comply with all Security Council arms embargo resolutions, which should have robust follow-up and monitoring mechanisms, in line with its resolution 2616 (2021).

The protection of civilians is, first and foremost, the responsibility of all parties to a conflict. The current state of civilian protection is extremely serious

and requires concerted efforts to strengthen compliance with international law and ensure accountability for its violations.

My country considers it essential for the United Nations to reflect on the protection of civilians in a holistic manner, strengthening compliance with international law and addressing the constantly evolving sources of civilian harm.

We therefore believe that the impact on civilians of environmental damage, the climate emergency, the malicious use of digital technologies, including the spread of misinformation and disinformation, the use of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems deserves our attention and consideration.

Accordingly, we call on the Security Council to remain actively seized of this issue so as to ensure that the United Nations remains at the forefront of efforts to protect civilians.

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

**Mr. Albanai (Kuwait):** I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Global Alliance for the Missing, a cross-regional group of States comprised of Argentina, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Croatia, Estonia, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, the Gambia and my own State, Kuwait.

Since this group was created, in 2021, in order to focus attention on missing persons and to promote the implementation of relevant obligations and commitments, we would like to highlight, through this statement, the importance of the dignified treatment of the dead as one key area in early response that can help prevent persons going missing.

As the Secretary-General notes in his most recent report on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) registered 40,000 new missing persons cases in 2023, its highest-ever yearly number. The sharp increase in missing persons is being driven by multiple ongoing armed conflicts. Tens of thousands of civilians and combatants have died over the past year in those conflicts. All too often, their remains are left under the rubble, on the battlefield or are buried without being documented or identified. Others disappear in detention or as the consequence of grave violations of international humanitarian law. As a result, countless families live in uncertainty over the fate of their loved



ones, often resulting in longer-term impacts on the wider community.

International humanitarian law, particularly as provided for in the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Protocols Additional of 1977, sets out clear obligations on parties to armed conflict with regard to the treatment of the dead and the search for missing persons. It also establishes the right of families to know the fate of their missing loved ones. If the dead are recovered and managed in a timely and dignified manner, their identity can often be established, and answers can be provided to their families.

That was explicitly recognized by the Security Council in resolution 2474 (2019), on missing persons in armed conflict. National and international processes, as well as the relevant expertise, have been developed over decades, including by many of the members of the Global Alliance for the Missing.

We call on the Security Council, on Member States and on relevant international and regional organizations to include concerns around the missing and the dead in their interactions with parties to armed conflict and in their own responses. We also call on States to cooperate in order to effectively solve cases of missing persons, including by providing mutual assistance with information-sharing, assistance to victims, the location and identification of missing persons, the recovery, identification and return of human remains, and, if possible, the identification, mapping and preservation of burial sites.

Specifically, we call for the search, recovery, documentation and identification of the dead to be integrated into the planning and conduct of humanitarian and reconstruction operations from day one. To that effect, States and relevant stakeholders should cooperate to mobilize and deploy the requisite expertise and capacities in a coordinated manner. Organizations such as the ICRC can help identify needs, ensure integration with the work of relevant authorities and thus contribute to the overall coherence and coordination of efforts.

Experience in many contexts has shown that where the actions that I have just outlined are taken early on, they can help prevent people from going missing. Doing so helps reduce long-term complex and expensive cases of missing persons, which leave families in painful uncertainty and can turn into obstacles to sustainable peace.

Members of the Global Alliance have considerable experience in that regard, which they stand ready to share. We look forward to a more focused discussion on preventing and responding to missing persons in armed conflict and the implementation of resolution 2474 (2019) at the upcoming Arria Formula meeting of the Security Council on missing persons in armed conflict, to be held on 12 June.

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

**Mr. Paulauskas (Lithuania):** Lithuania aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to make few points in my national capacity.

I thank the presidency of Mozambique for organizing this important debate. We commemorate two important anniversaries — the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

However, beyond merely being commemorative, this debate is highly relevant. The information in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385) is concerning, to say the least. Regrettably, it reflects our failure as the international community to ensure said protection. In 2023, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed and injured due to deliberate and indiscriminate attacks, amounting to a 72 per cent increase in civilian deaths, compared to 2022.

Among those targeted in military conflicts were journalists. In March, we commemorated two years since Lithuanian documentary filmmaker Mantas Kvedaravičius was murdered by Russian troops in occupied Mariupol. As co-Chair of the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists, Lithuania strongly condemns targeting journalists and media workers, who are considered civilians under international humanitarian law. Independent investigations must clarify the circumstances of such crimes and bring those responsible to justice.

On 7 October the cruel terrorist attack by Hamas against Israel resulted in multiple civilian deaths and destruction of civilian infrastructure. Lithuania condemns Hamas's brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel. We urge Hamas to release all hostages and ensure their protection. All alleged

violations must be investigated without delay and the perpetrators brought to justice. We also call for the implementation of all Security Council resolutions regarding the humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and ensuring humanitarian access.

We note with concern the worsening humanitarian situation in conflict areas in Africa, particularly the Sahel region and the Sudan, where ongoing hostilities have contributed to acute food insecurity. We reiterate the Secretary-General's call on all stakeholders to take necessary steps, including ensuring free movement of food supplies and fuel and safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access. Lithuania will continue supporting the Central Emergency Response Fund of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In February, we commemorated the second year of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, in which Russia is increasingly targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. Last year, 103 medical facilities and 294 educational institutions were destroyed or damaged in Ukraine. The flooding due to the destruction of the Kakhovka dam disrupted water and sanitation services for 1 million people. It is important to note that this is being perpetrated by a permanent member of Security Council that 25 years ago adopted resolution 1265 (1999) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which we are commemorating today.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has led to widespread death and suffering. There are thousands of recorded instances of torture, inhumane treatment and sexual violence; vast destruction of residential buildings and critical infrastructure across the country; and immense economic losses.

Last year, the establishment of the Register of Damage for Ukraine was a significant international effort to create a mechanism that will ensure justice and compensation for Ukraine and its people. We welcome the official opening in April of the claims' submission process for compensation for damage, loss and injury caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The scale of international crimes committed in Ukraine by Russia require constant and meticulous

attention and resolute coordinated legal actions by the entire international community. Further steps to achieve that, particularly regarding the crime of aggression, were discussed during the ninth meeting of the core group on the establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute the crime of aggression against Ukraine, which took place on 10 May in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Lithuania fully supports the Secretary-General's call to strengthen the protection of civilians, as reflected in the policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace. That also should include upholding the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional aimed at protecting people not taking part in hostilities. The recommendation to strengthen the protection of civilians from the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is significant.

Lithuania also supports efforts aimed at strengthening the resilience of United Nations peacekeepers, including measures to address disinformation and other forms of malign influence, such as the increased involvement of mercenaries and private military and security companies in violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Finally, we commend all efforts by the United Nations, its agencies and other international actors aimed at ensuring the sanctity of and respect for the lives of all non-combatants and full adherence to the principles of international humanitarian law. Collectively we should and need to do more, particularly in the current context of the ever-changing nature and methods of war, as rightly mentioned in the aide mémoire (S/2024/359, annex) transmitted in the letter from the President of the Security Council.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 6.05 p.m.*