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Provisional

President: Mr. Afonso (Mozambique)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Merabet
China	Mr. Youyi Zhuang
Ecuador	Mr. Egas Benavides
France	Mrs. Dime Labille
Guyana	Ms. Hazlewood
Japan	Mr. Ono
Malta	Ms. Bartolo
Republic of Korea	Ms. Kim Moon Young
Russian Federation	Mr. Leonidchenko
Sierra Leone	Mrs. Kamara-Joyner
Slovenia	Mr. Slamic
Switzerland	Mrs. Baumann-Bresolin
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Viney
United States of America	Mr. 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 10 a.m.

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

I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the Group of Arab States in this important debate, and I would like to thank all the briefers for their valuable input.

Adherence to the rules of protection of civilians in every situation of armed conflict is non-negotiable. That includes the situation in the Gaza Strip, where Palestinian civilians are being deliberately and systematically targeted. Israel's aggression has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians and injured more than 78,000. It has also displaced more than 75 per cent of Gaza's population and destroyed more than half of its buildings, including 360,000 housing units. Those numbers do not depict the full scale of the tragedy. Behind every number there are lives stolen, people displaced and families that have been entirely annihilated and erased from civil records.

The number of victims would not have risen to those horrific levels if Israel had adhered to the provisions of international humanitarian law and shouldered its responsibilities as an occupying Power under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and if Israel had complied with the orders issued by the International Court of Justice in the case brought by South Africa against Israel pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, instead of blatantly ignoring them.

The appalling situation in Gaza today is a direct result of Israel's attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure and the stifling restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid and commercial supplies. The current situation has led to unprecedented levels of food insecurity and exposed more than half a million Palestinians to famine, as Israel continues to use starvation as a weapon of war.

The targeting of humanitarian workers has made the situation worse. The Gaza Strip has become one of the most dangerous places on Earth for those heroes, who

risk their lives to provide relief assistance to those in need. Those acts of aggression have reached extremely dangerous levels, with the targeting of aid convoys and the premises of humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) headquarters in occupied East Jerusalem. Such repeated attacks flagrantly violate international law and require an immediate and transparent investigation to hold those responsible accountable.

We also have increasing concerns regarding Israel's recent dangerous escalation in Rafah and its forceful and unlawful control and closure of the Palestinian side of the crossing, as it ignores its obligations in accordance with international law. Fuel reserves are running out, and that will paralyse the movement of humanitarian aid and almost completely disrupt basic services in Gaza. The need by UNRWA to suspend food distributions in Rafah owing to the lack of supplies and insecurity reflects the deteriorating situation there.

When the Security Council adopted its first resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, resolution 1265 (1999), it recognized the impact of violence on women and children in particular. Yet, 25 years after the adoption of that resolution, we see that reality unfolding in a shocking manner in Gaza, where most victims are women and children. The number of children killed in the war exceeds the number of children killed in all conflicts around the world over the past four years.

The children of Gaza who have survived the war are suffering the worst conditions and have become the largest generation living with amputations in history. According to UNICEF, 90 per cent of the children in Gaza who are under the age of five are suffering from one or more diseases, while 16 per cent of children under the age of two are suffering from emaciation and stunting. That is in addition to the devastating impact of trauma on them, their parents and the entire society. Women in Gaza, especially pregnant and nursing women, are also facing grave risks amid an almost total absence of the most basic needs and services, including food, water and health care.

Neither journalists, doctors, elderly people nor people with disabilities have been spared by the war. In that regard, it is imperative to demand an immediate and independent international investigation into the alarming reports of mass graves and to bring perpetrators to justice. None of them should go unpunished.

Israel's violations have reached every part of the occupied Palestinian territory. Since last October, 480 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank, including 116 children. Moreover, 5,040 people have been wounded, mostly by live rounds, and nearly 1,950 Palestinians have been displaced owing to home demolitions and settler violence.

The situation in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory cannot be kept under a veil of secrecy or allowed to continue. The Security Council must shoulder its responsibilities and seriously consider providing international protection to the Palestinian people, in accordance with its mandate under the Charter of the United Nations.

Furthermore, the Group of Arab States condemns the repeated Israeli acts of aggression against Syrian territories and demands that such acts not be repeated. Similarly, we demand the same regarding the ongoing Israeli aggression against safe civilian villages in southern Lebanon, which constitutes a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law. That aggression has killed more than 80 civilians, including journalists, relief workers, women, children and the elderly; destroyed civilian infrastructure and entire villages; and displaced more than 93,000 Lebanese people. Furthermore, southern Lebanon was repeatedly bombarded with white phosphorus, which is internationally prohibited.

In the light of the outcomes of the thirty-third regular session of the Arab Summit, held in the Kingdom of Bahrain on 16 May, the Arab Group demands the following.

First, on achieving an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, we demand that the Israeli occupation forces halt their military operations in the Gaza Strip and withdraw from it, including the Rafah crossing. The Arab Group commends the efforts of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Qatar to reach a humanitarian truce in order to alleviate the suffering in Gaza, stop the escalation, put an end to the targeting and displacement of civilians and secure the release of prisoners and detainees.

Secondly, on ensuring the unhindered entry of humanitarian aid to Gaza, we demand the full opening of all crossings and the entry of commercial supplies in order to meet the needs of Gaza's population.

Thirdly, we demand that UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations be allowed to work freely and without any restrictions on their mandates,

especially in the light of the persistent obstacles created by the Israeli side, as well as supporting the efforts of Senior Coordinator Sigrid Kaag and facilitating her work.

Fourthly, we demand that effective measures be taken to ensure accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

In conclusion, we stress the need to end Israel's occupation of all Palestinian and Arab occupied territories, including the Syrian Golan, and to establish an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along the 1967 borders, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions.

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

Mr. Larsen (Australia): Australia thanks Mozambique for convening today's debate, and we thank the contribution made by our briefers. We very much appreciate the Secretary-General's engagement through his important report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385).

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians on the Security Council's agenda, we urge all parties to conflict to comply with their obligations under international law. The safety and security of all civilians must be upheld.

We stand on the precipice of a worsening crisis for civilians. This past year saw widespread and harrowing human suffering. Australia remains gravely concerned about civilians in many parts of the world, including Gaza and the Sudan, and those affected by the ongoing impacts of Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine. We recall that most victims of Hamas's abhorrent terror attacks on 7 October were civilians. The abduction of civilians and the use of sexual violence is never justified.

We are particularly alarmed that, in 2023, civilian deaths rose by 72 per cent from the previous year. That includes almost 30,000 civilians who were killed or injured by the use of explosive weapons, across just six conflicts. Attacks on schools, including 408 directly hit or damaged in Gaza, and more than 3,000 in Ukraine, further compound the physical and psychological burden children bear in conflict. The reprehensible destruction of critical infrastructure, including hospitals and water supplies in Gaza, the Sudan and Burkina Faso, and the

Kakhovka dam in Ukraine, increases health risks faced by civilians in conflict. That is unacceptable.

We urge all States to endorse 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 Safe Schools Declaration and to ensure their full implementation. We note that the protection of civilians would not be possible without first responders. The death of at least 262 aid workers in Gaza alone serves to underscore the need to ensure greater protection for humanitarian and aid workers. We commend Switzerland's leadership in drafting a resolution in that regard. We must never again witness the tragedies of Rwanda and Srebrenica, which set the backdrop for resolution 1265 (1999).

For all the sobering trends in this year's report, there is nevertheless hope. Timely action and protection mandates in peacekeeping missions have saved countless lives. We must use this anniversary to reaffirm our collective commitment to the protection of civilians. We must all do better.

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

Mrs. González (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure to see you preside over this meeting, Sir. We thank the Mozambican presidency for convening this open debate and allowing non-members of the Security Council to express their views on a topic as relevant as the protection of civilians and to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), which established the protection of civilians as an item on the Council's agenda, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

My delegation associates itself with the statements delivered, respectively, by the representatives of Morocco, on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, and Norway, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

In the context of ongoing conflicts around the world, Uruguay emphasizes the growing importance of adherence to mandates for the protection of civilians and strict compliance with international humanitarian law. The Security Council has a key role to play in addressing those challenges. While we recognize progress in the protection of civilians, we caution against a growing disjuncture between legal obligations and practical implementation, which jeopardizes progress on all

protection agendas and increases the vulnerability of civilians to atrocity crimes.

We emphasize the need for parties to armed conflict to ensure an environment conducive to the work of humanitarian personnel, who must have safe, unimpeded, effective and sustained access to civilians, in particular to especially vulnerable populations, such as women, children, victims of sexual violence and persons with disabilities.

Beyond the responsibility of the Council to address that growing disjuncture — a consequence of non-compliance with international humanitarian law — we must recognize our collective responsibility to also address the elements that aggravate and hinder the implementation of mandates for the protection of civilians. Those include forced displacement, obstacles to access to medical assistance, the destruction of hospitals and infrastructure, food insecurity and the lack of safe drinking water, as well as the consequences of natural disasters and climate change. Access to food and humanitarian assistance must be guaranteed, and humanitarian corridors must be promoted.

Uruguay calls on all Member States to support the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, while underscoring the need for collective action to mitigate the impact of such weapons on civilians.

In conclusion, Uruguay reiterates its firm commitment to advancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict and stands ready to engage constructively with other Member States to address the multifaceted challenges we face in that endeavour. We still have a great deal of work to do, but above all, we must honour the commitments we have undertaken.

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

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): Brazil aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Norway on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, of which we are a proud member.

The Geneva Conventions were the culmination of years of development of a legal body that sought to bring some level of humanity to warfare after repeated dreadful experiences worldwide. The inclusion of the protection of civilians on the Council's agenda 25 years ago was a relevant step forward. It opened the path for key resolutions. Those two developments are certainly

causes for celebration. However, commemorations should not be empty ceremonial events. Rather, they must be acts of conscious reckoning with the lessons from history.

That is why today we must be frank and direct. Instead of reaping the benefits of its own past work and, more important, of the development of international humanitarian law, the Council has now become a passive beholder of a complete and repeated disregard for humanitarian tenets. It has been idly watching parties to conflicts in many parts of the world seek maximum damage in total disregard for their deadly impact on civilians, the use of civilians as human shields and hostages or direct terror inflicted on civilians as a means to weaken resistance. The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) is a vivid and tragic illustration thereof.

Violence against civilians happens in many, if not all, armed conflicts, and Brazil deplores each and every case equally. One civilian hurt or killed in an armed conflict anywhere is one too many.

At the same time, the sheer magnitude of the ongoing violence against civilians in Gaza warrants and even demands a specific reference. We unequivocally condemned the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October of last year and the unacceptable taking of hostages, for whose immediate release we firmly called and do so now yet again.

At the same time, we cannot condone the disproportionate Israeli reaction that has led to a staggering and ever-increasing number of civilian casualties, in blatant and continued violation of the principles of international humanitarian law. A permanent ceasefire is an absolute imperative to stop the carnage and spare innocent lives.

Another source of grave concern in Gaza and around the world is violence against humanitarian workers and attacks on their premises and assets. That is why Brazil, at the end of its most recent term on the Council, proposed a draft resolution on the inviolability and protection of humanitarian assistance. We thank Switzerland for following up on that initiative and hope that the Council will promptly adopt the draft resolution as steered by the Swiss.

Brazil is also concerned with the criminalization of humanitarian assistance. Resolution 2664 (2022) was a big step forward in countering that trend, but the attempts to undermine the work of United Nations agencies and humanitarian non-governmental organizations is a major step backwards. The example

of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East comes to mind. The whole Agency cannot be punished for the alleged wrongdoings of a few or some of its workers. The latter must be punished accordingly, if duly proved guilty, but not the millions who depend on the Agency to survive. Dismantling or weakening the Agency would amount to imposing an absurd death penalty on the very victims of widespread violence.

We are at the crossroads of a concerning disbelief in the ability to settle disputes through peaceful means. By action or complacency, we are also jeopardizing the foundations of international humanitarian law. The international community, and the Council in particular, must act decisively to avert the tragic course of such a dreadful combination, which is profoundly marking our times as one of the worst in modern history.

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

Mrs. Vives Balmaña (Andorra) (spoke in French): First and foremost, I would like to thank Mozambique for organizing this open debate commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and thank the speakers for their remarks.

Andorra aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of European Union. I would like to add a few points in my national capacity.

As underscored in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385), Andorra is alarmed by the erosion of international humanitarian law and by the increase in the number of civilian victims of conflicts, in particular women and children.

“In 2023, 4 out of every 10 civilians killed in conflicts were women, and 3 out of 10 were children.” (S/2024/385, *para. 6*)

Andorra is fully committed to ensuring the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law, by acceding to the main treaties, conventions and initiatives. We have an obligation to honour those commitments to save lives and human dignity.

With a view to strengthening the protection of civilians, we attribute particular importance to the three aspects.

First, we stress the importance of disarmament, and specifically with regard to the use of anti-personnel mines, with the Ottawa Convention and, of course, to the use of explosive weapons, for which we have endorsed

the 2022 Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

Secondly, we underscore the importance of the rights of the child with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. I would like to commend the agenda of the Security Council on the subject of children in armed conflict and the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in raising awareness of the legal and normative framework of international humanitarian law and international criminal law that safeguards the rights of children affected by conflict. Children's rights must be protected and promoted. The right to right to education, including the Safe Schools Declaration, is very important. Children must have full access to humanitarian assistance. We must ensure their right to engage in play, which is critical, and above all, to be protected against hunger and food insecurity, which are among the methods of war condemned by the Security Council in its resolution 2417 (2018).

Lastly, we stress the importance of the women and peace and security agenda and initiatives. In that regard, as we mentioned in previous debates, we remain deeply concerned by the current widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence as a tactic of war, as mentioned in the report and highlighted by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, whom we thank for her leadership. Indeed, sexual and gender-based violence is recognized as a tactic of war that may constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, thereby demanding a security response. The responsibility of the perpetrators of those crimes is recognized in resolution 2106 (2013), which addresses the issue and acknowledges the key role of the Rome Statute in bridging the impunity gap for those heinous crimes.

In conclusion, ending impunity for attacks on civilians can contribute to respect for the rules of war and calls for a non-armed, non-violent approach to conflict, as key factors for prevention.

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

Mr. Miller (Israel): As we convene today to discuss the Secretary General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict for the year 2023 (S/2024/385), for some, the topic is more than just words

on a page. For some, the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a reality that they experience every day.

As we speak, there are civilians who do not enjoy any protection because they are being held hostage by the vicious terror organization Hamas, which has deprived them of daylight, medical assistance and International Committee of the Red Cross visits for 228 days now. We cannot sit at this table and discuss the protection of civilians in armed conflict without mentioning the 128 hostages who remain in Hamas's captivity since the tragic events of the 7 October massacre, the youngest of whom, Kfir Bibas, was less than one year old when he was abducted, and the oldest, Shlomo Mansour, an 86-year-old Holocaust survivor. There were 1,200 people who were butchered on 7 October and more than 5,500 who were maimed. There were 252 hostages who were abducted, including infants, entire families, persons with disabilities and Holocaust survivors, some of whom have since been executed and many of whom have been tortured, sexually abused and starved in captivity. As we speak today, more than 150,000 Israeli civilians have been displaced from their homes, both on the southern and the northern borders, owing to the ongoing attacks by Hizbullah in the north and Hamas and its allies in the south.

The horrifying acts of violence documented on 7 October only add to the trauma experienced by those displaced individuals. Today, as we have done for the past 228 days, we continue to urge the Council to do everything in its power and act for the hostages' swift release, without which the title of today's discussion — the protection of civilians in armed conflict — is regretfully just an empty slogan.

The crimes of Hamas and its allies continue daily and pose a grave threat to the region, as well as international peace and security, a fact that many, including in this Chamber, continue to overlook and deny. In that vein, we must express our genuine concern regarding the dangerous link between spreading disinformation, ignorance and the cycle of violence.

As we see around the world today, the disinformation pandemic has taken over the most respected institutions of our time. When ignorance meets disinformation, it disseminates extremism, which in turn leads to more violence and the perpetuation of hate. We are concerned, as all Council members should be, that that hate, which is already seeping through the cracks, will end in horrifying acts of violence. Therefore, in the interest of disseminating truthful information, let us now set the record straight once again. Israel is engaged in a defensive struggle against Hamas — Hamas,

which is known for its disregard for civilian lives; Hamas, which routinely employs despicable tactics and hides behind its population; Hamas, which uses Palestinian children as human shields; Hamas, which commandeers hospitals, turning them into terror hubs and into their own headquarters; Hamas, which abducted innocent Israeli civilians from their homes and now surrounds itself with our people to conceal its operations; Hamas, which, time and again, bombs humanitarian crossings and steals the delivery of aid from its own people; Hamas, which, despite numerous and extremely generous ceasefire offers, persistently refuses to lay down its arms and continues to perpetuate heinous crimes against Israeli civilians and its own Palestinian population.

Israel does everything in its power to act in accordance with the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution, and we pay a heavy price for our commitment. We are often required to put our own forces at risk in order to preserve civilian life. Years of conflict have sharpened our expertise in urban warfare, developing complex strategies for minimizing civilian casualties — more so than any other army in the world. However, Israel is fighting a vicious enemy. While we are trying to minimize casualties, Hamas tries to maximize them. While we adhere to the rules of international humanitarian law, Hamas blatantly defies them and openly fires from civilian population centres, making a mockery of our established international legal system. While we try to evacuate Palestinian civilians to keep them from harm, exercising robust precautionary measures, Hamas threatens its own civilians with continued danger or hides within evacuating crowds to shield itself from harm.

The difference between us has never been more palpable. We lament every civilian casualty in our region, but we have not heard a single condemnation from any Palestinian official of the 7 October attack, or any of the terror attacks that followed that atrocious day. Hamas does not care about civilian lives; they have made it perfectly clear. They pride themselves on their disregard for human life and their cruelty towards civilians. But the Palestinian Authority, judging by its unfortunate choices, does not care about its own civilians either. The Palestinian Authority is trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. They will not condemn Hamas, yet they gladly repeat its propaganda. They will not express concern for the hostages, demand their release and do everything in their power to ensure the hostages receive humanitarian assistance, yet they cry out to the world to send humanitarian aid to their

own civilians. They shoulder none of the responsibility and accept no accountability.

Protecting Israeli civilians as a democratic, law-abiding State can be very challenging. Repeatedly, we find ourselves attacked by forces that have no respect for international legal norms and that, in fact, actively try to disrupt the rules-based order. Israel will not succumb to terror, and we will not give up on our values. We will continue defending civilians in our region, both Israeli and Palestinian. We will continue providing humanitarian aid to all those in need. We will continue to distinguish between civilians and combatants and take all the necessary precautions, as mandated by international humanitarian law and far beyond the letter of the law. We will continue fighting against terror. We extend a hand in peace to all our partners to work with us towards a more peaceful and safer Middle East for every civilian — man, woman and child. Join us in this endeavour. Do not stand idly by.

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

Mr. Hoang Nguyen Nguyen (Viet Nam): Viet Nam wishes to thank Mozambique for convening this important meeting.

Armed conflicts and hostilities nowadays continue to threaten the lives and jeopardize the livelihood of millions of civilians in different parts of the world. Take Gaza as an example, where, on average, more than 150 civilians have lost their lives every day over the past seven months. That reality serves to underscore the need for more concrete actions from Member States and the Security Council to better protect civilians in conflicts. In that connection, we call on all parties to the ongoing conflicts to strictly abide by international law, especially the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and other relevant instruments of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions.

Within the United Nations framework, the Security Council and other main organs must remain actively seized of the humanitarian situations in conflict areas and take necessary actions in a timely manner, including compulsory measures under Chapter VII of the Charter, when necessary, in order to bring an end to casualties and to the harm caused to the civilian population and infrastructure. In addition, United Nations peacekeeping missions play a crucial role in monitoring the implementation of, and compliance with, international humanitarian standards by parties to conflicts on the ground, thus contributing to mitigating

the impacts of conflict on civilians, especially women and children.

From its own experience, Viet Nam deeply understands the impacts and long-term consequences of wars and conflicts on the lives and well-being of the civilian population. We are of the view that the best way to protect civilians at all times is to address the root causes of conflicts and to create conditions conducive for dialogue and reconciliation in order to prevent any occurrence or recurrence of armed confrontations. For its part, Viet Nam has made continuing efforts to promote the protection of civilians in conflicts. In terms of national legislation, Viet Nam has criminalized in its penal code such serious crimes as aggression, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of undermining peace. In the Security Council, during its presidency in April 2021, Viet Nam spearheaded the adoption of resolution 2573 (2021), on safeguarding critical civilian infrastructure in conflicts. We also authored a presidential statement on mine action (S/PRST/2021/8) and presided over an open debate (see S/2021/375) on conflict-related sexual violence and an Arria Formula meeting on parental care for unattended children during conflicts. And by continuing to actively participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations, Viet Nam has effectively contributed to the protection of civilians on the ground.

Viet Nam remains committed to further promoting the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, and it stands ready to work with fellow Member States and relevant organizations in that common endeavour, including through the effective implementation of the Council's relevant resolutions.

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

Mrs. Zalabata Torres (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Colombia robustly defends the importance of multilateralism and of international humanitarian law in addressing the complex challenges posed by international and non-international armed conflicts. The increase in conflict and violence across the world is alarming and has had appalling consequences for the civilian population, disproportionately affecting women, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples and rural communities.

It is therefore timelier than ever to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and to reaffirm our collective commitment to preventing conflicts and seeking peace. In that regard, we urge Member States to implement

the provisions of that resolution, particularly those that pertain to the protection of civilians and to ensuring unhindered and safe access for humanitarian personnel to civilians in situations of armed conflict.

In turn, the strategies for prevention, protection and care must take into account the cultural, ethnic, economic, political, legal, social and geographic specificities of civilians in order to promote actions that are specific to context. Aware of the challenges we face with regard to the humanitarian situation in our country, Colombia has prioritized the implementation of the 2016 peace agreements and the implementation of programmes and projects, all of which will enable us to build a culture of peace throughout our national territory.

Numerous factors persist that affect the civilian population and that we must redouble our efforts to tackle. They include threats of explosive devices, the increase of overcrowding in temporary detention centres, environmental deterioration, food insecurity and the presence of armed actors in rural areas. As long as those factors persist, it will remain our duty to provide civilians with sufficient and meaningful protection in order to reduce the human, economic, social and environmental costs of violence and to facilitate the building of sustainable peace.

In order to strengthen the guarantees provided by the Colombian State, the Government of Gustavo Petro Urrego is making progress on establishing a national commission for the application of international humanitarian law, an advisory and support body for the entities and organizations responsible for implementing national measures and strategies. Colombia has also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and has built a cooperative relationship between the International Committee of the Red Cross and various State entities in order to make progress on implementing our national plan of action.

Systematically including international humanitarian law considerations at all levels is essential to respond effectively to the needs of the civilian population. We therefore call for renewed commitment by all States to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Protocols Additional and the provisions of resolution 1265 (1999).

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

Archbishop Caccia (Holy See): As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, it is clear that the need to strengthen the

protection of civilians in armed conflicts is more urgent than ever.

The increase in conflicts around the world in recent years is alarming. Those conflicts have catastrophic effects on the lives of millions of people, with civilians bearing the brunt of the impact. Indeed, it appears that the distinction between military and civil targets is no longer respected. There is no conflict that does not end up in some way indiscriminately striking the civilian population. The majority of those affected by the scourge of war are compelled to flee their countries of origin, while a significant number of others have fallen victim to such conflicts. It is imperative that civilian victims are not seen as collateral damage, but as men and women with names and surnames. In the light of those grave circumstances, the Holy See calls for the implementation of resolution 1265 (1999) in the protection of those who face greater risks during conflict, including humanitarian personnel, health-care workers, religious personnel, journalists, displaced persons, women, children and persons with disabilities.

While emphasizing the need to properly implement those provisions and incorporate them into all peacekeeping mandates, my delegation would like to present three key points for the Security Council's consideration.

First, it is important to recognize that modern war no longer takes place solely on the battlefield. It also adversely affects civilian infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and places of worship. Those safe havens can, devastatingly, become targets, disproportionately affecting the lives of the innocent and defenceless. In that regard, my delegation calls for the particular protection of places of worship in conflict zones. Those sites are not merely places of prayer — they also serve as places of assistance and protection for those in need.

Secondly, the cessation of the production, stockpiling and use of indiscriminate weapons, such as landmines, cluster munitions and explosive weapons, in populated areas is a crucial measure for ensuring the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. The consequences of those instruments of death are well known. Along with other explosive remnants of war, they continue to pose a serious threat to civilians even after the hostilities have ended. In that regard, my delegation commends the Mine Action Service for its valuable work and calls for the implementation of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

Thirdly, the blockade of humanitarian aid in conflict zones and the increased attacks on humanitarian personnel are of great concern. While asking that international humanitarian law be strictly observed, the Holy See condemns any attempt to obstruct the delivery of supplies, such as food, water and medicine, to those suffering the impacts of war, as well as indiscriminate attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel, who put their lives in danger to help the population on the ground.

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

Ms. Hayovyshyn (Ukraine): My delegation is grateful to Mozambique and Switzerland for convening this important debate.

The topic is of great importance to Ukraine, as the Ukrainian civilian population is heavily attacked by the Russian Federation on a daily basis. We appreciate the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385), which outlines the dire situation at the forefront of the protection of civilians around the globe and particularly in my country.

Civilians and their rights are among the first to be hit by any war. It is the case for Ukrainians, whom the Russian Federation has made the targets of its war of aggression. It is the case for people in other countries suffering from conflicts, including in the Middle East and Africa. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Security Council's consideration of the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. It is almost a quarter of a century ago that the Security Council, in its first thematic resolution, resolution 1265 (1999), underlined the need to put an end to the deliberate targeting of civilians and emphasized the responsibility of States to end impunity and prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law. A year later, in 2000, Ukraine, as an elected Council member at the time, voted for another thematic resolution, resolution 1296 (2000). By adopting that document, the Council reaffirmed its readiness to consider situations of the deliberate targeting of civilian populations and other violations in situations of armed conflict and to adopt appropriate steps. After so many years, we continue to see a grim increase in civilian casualties due to conflicts. The Council's capacity to take efficient action remains a goal rather than a reality.

The Russian Federation continues its war of terror against the Ukrainian people, targeting critical civilian

infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, and residential areas with a wide range of conventional arms, including missiles, aerial bombs and combat uncrewed aerial vehicles. That relentless onslaught has resulted in significant casualties and widespread destruction. Despite global condemnation and numerous appeals from Ukraine and the international community, the Russian Federation persists in committing the crimes of deportation and forced displacement of Ukrainian children. Global support is crucial. We call for increased consolidated international pressure on Russia to stop its international humanitarian law violations and to return all Ukrainian deportees, including children, prisoners of war and civilian detainees. That is one of the key priorities of the peace formula and will be one of the key topics of the upcoming peace summit in Switzerland in June. Accountability and damage compensation for those crimes is what a just peace entails. Ukraine has developed a unique concept for an international compensation mechanism to address the damage to the civilian population caused by the Russian aggression. We will spare no efforts in supporting the establishment of such a mechanism, which will serve as a deterrent against future acts of aggression towards sovereign States.

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

Mr. Muhamad (Malaysia): Malaysia thanks Mozambique for convening this important debate. Our gratitude also goes to the briefers for their valuable insights.

Malaysia condemns violent attacks on civilians during armed conflicts. Regrettably, in many parts of the world, for example in Palestine and Myanmar, innocent civilians, including women and children, media personnel and humanitarian workers, continue to bear the brunt of war. The 2024 report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2024/385) paints a distressing picture, stating that armed conflict continues to cause great suffering among civilians, marked by unacceptable levels of death, destruction to civilian infrastructure, conflict-induced hunger and forced displacement.

My delegation wishes to make the following points.

First, Malaysia advocates the peaceful settlement of disputes, in line with the Charter of the United Nations. Ending armed conflict is the most effective way to protect civilians. Therefore, there must be real efforts to end ongoing armed conflicts through durable and permanent ceasefires in order to make

way for dialogue and peaceful resolution. Ceasefires, and the end to hostilities in general, are also crucial to enable humanitarian assistance to be delivered more effectively to affected civilians.

Secondly, the virulence of conflict is partly caused by a culture of impunity. Genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression are among the most serious crimes under international law. The perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable and brought to justice. The important role of accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court and international tribunals set up by the United Nations, cannot be overstated. There must be no selectivity or double standards in the application of accountability processes. Selectivity and double standards will only undermine the legitimacy of and trust in such processes, and also international law more broadly.

Thirdly, the responsibility and obligations of Member States to protect civilians in armed conflict are clearly stipulated in international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions. We must remember that there are laws, even in war, although war must be avoided by all means. The protection of civilians is central to the rules of war as stipulated in the Geneva Conventions. Compliance with those laws is not optional; it is a moral and legal obligation.

Finally, Malaysia considers United Nations peacekeeping operations to be an indispensable instrument in the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Malaysia is one of the long-standing contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and there are currently 865 personnel of the Malaysian Armed Forces and Royal Malaysia Police in five United Nations peacekeeping operations.

With so many armed conflicts still raging around the world, our discussion today is extremely vital and relevant. While we continue striving towards ending those armed conflicts, we must also do more to uphold international humanitarian law and implement relevant United Nations resolutions to ensure the protection of civilians. Malaysia will continue to do its part in contributing constructively in that endeavour.

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

Mr. Banya (Palestine) (*spoke in French*): The Geneva Conventions were adopted 75 years ago to protect people not taking part in hostilities, primarily civilians. They were adopted in response to the Second World War, in which civilians bore the brunt in the absence

of an identifiable front line. The priority was to restore the principles of humanity and distinction in order to restore the protection of civilians who were then, more than ever, exposed to the horrors of war. Since then, humankind has constantly reaffirmed and strengthened its fundamental rules, including the Security Council, which, 25 years ago, undertook to promote the protection of civilians and adopted resolutions concerning civilians and groups whose protection was particularly important, including children, women, humanitarian personnel and journalists.

Yet it is precisely those protected groups that Israel is targeting in Gaza, which has seen the highest number of children killed, United Nations personnel killed, national and international humanitarian personnel killed and journalists killed. This is year zero for international law in Gaza, as if rules had never been made. But rules do exist, and their flagrant violation must be punished. It is impunity that has left our people helpless in the face of a ruthless war machine that sees each and every one of them, from before birth and even after death, as enemies. Those are not simply words, but a reality.

Do members know how many pregnant women have been killed with their unborn babies? Do they know that Israel holds the bodies of Palestinians it has killed, sometimes for decades, refusing to return them to their families so that they can finally bury them?

Never before has a civilian population been so targeted in a territory that is on its knees, besieged, bombed and starving. People move around in a cage, trying to avoid death with nowhere to go, to be forcibly moved from one death to the next. Nearly 1 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced in the past two weeks, once again trying to dodge Israeli bombardment. Never has a country's civilian infrastructure been so methodically destroyed — hospitals, universities, schools, international institutions and places where civilians have taken refuge, including United Nations buildings.

Parents are powerless to protect their children, who have been abandoned by the law and those who have an obligation to defend them. It is very difficult to truly describe the scenes we are seeing in Gaza. Palestinians have been summarily executed after being detained, while tied up and blindfolded. Mass graves have been discovered, revealing the scale and horror of the crimes. Palestinian prisoners, including the thousands arrested over the past six months, are being tortured, leading to amputations and deaths in custody. In Gaza, an entire population is besieged, bombarded and starving. And

starvation is not the side effect of war, but an additional weapon deployed by Israel against the Palestinian people. A population is dying while humanitarian aid is only a few feet away. And what Israel is not blocking, it is allowing its settlers and extremists to attack and destroy.

Does anyone in the Council not think that Palestinian parents suffer when they lose their children? Can anyone here who has children, who knows children, imagine what it is like for those orphans, those amputees, those children traumatized for life?

In the West Bank, attacks by Israeli settlers and occupying forces are relentless. More than 500 people have been killed and thousands injured in the past six months, including yesterday in Jenin, where a surgeon, a teacher and students were killed.

Instead of being held accountable, Israel is emboldened by the impunity it has enjoyed until now. It accuses and incites violence against the United Nations. We saw it again today in the statement by the Israeli representative against humanitarian agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), against non-governmental organizations and against States that dare to denounce those crimes. It shamelessly accuses everyone, including its closest allies, of antisemitism and complicity with terrorism and Nazism. And such incitement has actual consequences on the ground, driving Israeli soldiers to kill United Nations and humanitarian personnel and driving settlers to ambush humanitarian aid and attack UNRWA.

The Council has a responsibility to implement its resolutions on the ground in Palestine. Israel leaves the Council with only one choice, which will prove decisive for the future of international law — sacrifice the rules and mechanisms put in place to defend civilian populations and international law in order to protect Israel's impunity, or put an end to that impunity, in order to defend those rules and mechanisms. The choice seems obvious, but some States are wavering. They are in the minority, but I would like to mention them today. We call on them to wake up before it is too late, so that shame does not haunt them forever for the choices they are making and for their complicity, whether through their actions or their inaction in the face of the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

A State above the law will always behave like a State outside the law. That is what we are seeing today, and that is the price that Palestinian people are paying. The

only way to truly protect civilians is to want to protect all civilians, without distinction on the basis of their origin, their religious affiliation, their racial affiliation, and the State of Palestine's commitment in that respect is absolute. We have never justified killing civilians.

But Israel shows selective outrage. When its civilians are killed, the whole world must rise up and reject it. When its civilians are held captive, the whole world must mobilize to free them. But Israel does not hesitate to justify killing Palestinian civilians by the tens of thousands — more than 35,000 in Gaza — wounding more than 80,000 Palestinians in Gaza, displacing more than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza and holding 9,000 Palestinian prisoners, including young children, in its prisons and cages. One million Palestinians have been detained by Israel, at one time or another, from the Nakba to the present day.

Some people are afraid to use certain words when it comes to Israel, but what we must fear is not the words, but the policies they describe — policies from which our people suffer. And let me say to the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide that she should have proudly mentioned Gaza today, that she is not fulfilling her mandate by deciding to say nothing about the horrors our people are experiencing in Gaza, that she is deciding to say nothing while the International Court of Justice is examining the charge of genocide against Israel and while the entire world is watching Israel deprive our people of the most elementary conditions of life and methodically destroy all the conditions indispensable to life in Gaza. Instead, she said not a single word about Gaza in order to prevent genocide, even as genocide is under way in Gaza.

Allow me to conclude by evoking an important historical event that is one of the reasons behind the whole development of law as we know it — the Holocaust. Israel is evoking the Holocaust in order to protect itself against accusations of these crimes. It is using the memory of 6 million victims to justify the crimes that we have denounced together as humankind, especially after the horror of the Holocaust. We honour the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and of all victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide throughout history and around the world. We always remember that there are no civilian populations more civilian than others. Our civilians are civilians. Palestinians are human beings. Those who refuse to recognize our humanity, those who deny our existence, those who deny our belonging to the family of nations must be condemned and must never be allowed to condemn

others. We stand together and by their side to defend these principles and humanity.

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

Mr. Doualeh (Djibouti): At the outset, Djibouti expresses its gratitude to Mozambique for convening this annual open debate of the Security Council on a matter of vital importance and thanks the Secretary-General for the annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385).

The report gives an opportunity to assess the state of the protection of civilians in the world, and the findings continue to underscore two major facts: first, there are too many conflicts in the world — some protracted, with a duration of more than 30 years — and secondly, the toll of armed conflicts on civilians in many conflict zones throughout the world is shocking.

Over the course of 25 years, since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), we have collectively invested in enhancing the protection agenda, strengthening its architecture and establishing monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Through substantive policy discussions, we continuously developed a shared understanding of what protection mandates entail for United Nations peace operations.

We welcome the fact that the protection of civilians agenda is prioritized in resolution 2719 (2023) in the planning, as well as the concept of operations and rules of engagement, of African Union-led peace support operations. Djibouti is one of the highest per capita contributors of uniformed personnel to United Nations peacekeeping support mandates anchored on protecting international humanitarian law when mitigating armed conflicts. African peacekeepers are increasingly faced with situations where they have to confront radicalized violent groups and non-State actors with hostile intentions and who deliberately target non-combatants. In the light of the changing nature of conflicts, in particular on the continent of Africa, we underscore the importance of ensuring adequate resources, including force multipliers and enablers, as well as modern mechanical and technological instruments.

Notwithstanding that progress, Djibouti is deeply disturbed by the continued erosion of compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In too many places, civilians in conflicts are vulnerable to the consequences of war. Instead of endeavouring to limit the barbarity of war, we note the deliberate targeting and killing of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including

hospitals and schools. The integrity of United Nations facilities and premises must be protected at all times under international humanitarian law. Civilians must be protected in the Sudan, Ukraine and, especially, Gaza, to mention just a few. Israel, which seems to have decreed Palestinians unfit to live, is committing large-scale genocide in Gaza and continues to unashamedly rationalize the killing of civilians and the use of starvation as a method of warfare. The assault on Rafah will further compound a catastrophic humanitarian situation.

These extremely negative developments threaten 25 years of progress. As we celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Convention of 1949, let us recommit, with renewed urgency, to the implementation of international law and Security Council resolutions for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, and let us promote accountability. As a signatory of the Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocity, Djibouti calls on all States to consider lending their most valuable support to the crucial initiative launched by France and Mexico.

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

Mr. Muhith (Bangladesh): I thank the presidency of Mozambique for convening today's open debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

Today's debate coincides with the seventy-fifth anniversary of 1949 Geneva Conventions, which represent the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), which recognized the need to protect civilians during armed conflicts, in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law.

Sadly, today's debate also coincides with the most blatant display of disregard for the international norms related to the protection of civilians. Civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in situations of armed conflict, especially in the course of the current brutal aggression in Gaza, where they are exposed to indiscriminate killing, forced displacement and starvation, among others, as methods of warfare. We are also witnessing, across multiple situations of armed conflict, the unlawful denial of access to humanitarian aid; attacks on medical personnel and humanitarian

personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, as well as on hospitals and other medical facilities; and the intentional damaging and unlawful destruction of civilian infrastructure, property and livelihoods.

In the Rakhine state of Myanmar, we are deeply concerned about by the renewed instances of conflicts between the military and the armed groups, which left civilians, especially the Rohingya minorities, extremely vulnerable to atrocity crimes. The civilians, especially the young people and children, are reportedly being forcibly recruited and being used as human shields.

Owing to our own experience in Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war, which saw the killing of 3 million civilians and sexual violence against more than 200,000 women, we remain deeply committed to the United Nations protection-of-civilians agenda. Our peacekeepers have played a crucial role in putting the principle in practice when it was introduced for the first time in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone back in 1999.

Allow me to highlight a few points.

First, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his most recent report (S/2024/385) and his previous reports, States and parties to conflict must redouble their efforts to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law and ensure accountability for violations. Ensuring accountability is critical to prevent recurrence of such heinous crimes in the future. In that regard, we appreciate the most recent efforts of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to ensure accountability for the crimes committed in Gaza and express our full support to the ICC's competence, integrity and independence as a Court of law to hold perpetrators of such crimes accountable.

Secondly, it is essential to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in need during armed conflict and also to ensure an uninterrupted supply of life-saving materials to people affected by conflicts. We express our concerns about the deliberate killing of and attacks against humanitarian and United Nations personnel and call for respect for and full compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to conflict.

Thirdly, United Nations peacekeepers have an important role in protecting the civilians in the areas in which they serve. While the peacekeeping mandate should be realistic to facilitate the protection of civilians, at the same time, a coordinated and coherent approach among peacekeeping operations, United Nations agencies and the host country is needed to protect

civilians during transitions and after the withdrawal of missions by formulating appropriate action plans in coordination with local and international partners.

Finally, I wish to refer to the Secretary-General's proposed New Agenda for Peace, which calls for a reduction of the human cost of weapons. We urge all Member States to take collective and decisive actions towards banning the transfer of weapons in situations in which their use is likely to cause harm to civilians and towards reducing military expenditure.

In conclusion, I reiterate Bangladesh's strong commitment to ensure the protection of civilians. We will continue to contribute to the protection-of-civilians mandate of the United Nations through peacekeeping operations and other forms of engagements.

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

Mr. Ostowar (Kingdom of the Netherlands): At the outset, I would like to thank Mozambique for organizing this important and humbling debate.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

The protection and safety of civilians, especially women and girls, remains a major challenge in many contexts and crises. Furthermore, it is extremely worrisome that civilians increasingly are becoming direct targets of hostilities and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence. Addressing those issues requires a genuine commitment. It also requires an integrated approach across diverse thematic fields, including peace, security, humanitarian efforts, human rights, gender and development.

In my national capacity, I would like to focus on three key areas for operationalizing and strengthening the protection of civilians: investing in prevention, prioritizing a people-centred approach and incorporating mental health and psychosocial support into our strategies. Allow me to briefly elaborate on each of those areas.

First, we must continuously invest in mechanisms to prevent conflicts and their recurrence. Prevention is more effective than a cure. That includes preventing civilian harm where conflicts occur and within both peace enforcement and peacekeeping operations. Effective national protocols for civilian harm prevention

and mitigation are crucial. Furthermore, enhancing the practical knowledge of international humanitarian law among armed actors is essential. Research shows that programmes increasing international humanitarian law knowledge and harm mitigation practices reduce civilian impact and shift decision-making towards protecting civilians.

Secondly, we must prioritize a people-centred approach. By placing people at the heart of our efforts, our strategies become more effective, more sustainable and responsive to the needs of those we aim to protect. That includes investing in and empowering local protection and peacebuilding initiatives. Civil society and grass-roots initiatives often play a key role in protecting across all conflict cycles and in transition settings. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is a proud long-term partner of many such organizations at the grass-roots, national and international levels.

Thirdly and finally, we must recognize the importance of mental health and psychosocial support in our protection approaches. Research shows that repeated exposure to violence and traumatic events can exacerbate trauma symptoms among security actors. That, in turn, affects their mental health and increases the likelihood of violent interactions within communities and among those actors. Trauma also impedes reconciliation and long-term peace. Integrating mental health and psychosocial support helps to mitigate those risks.

I would like to conclude by saying that we still have a lot of work to do in the area of the protection of civilians. And the Kingdom of the Netherlands remains firmly committed to that cause.

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

Mr. Mao (Cambodia): At the outset, I wish to express my appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening today's annual open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999). I also extend my gratitude to the briefers and speakers for their insightful remarks.

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, it is disheartening that safeguarding civilians in armed conflicts remains a significant concern. In this open debate, our thoughts are with those living under the shadow of war, whose lives are disrupted and whose futures are uncertain.

Cambodia's history stands as a touching reminder of the devastating impact of armed conflict on civilians. Our people have endured immense suffering, loss and displacement during more than three decades of civil war.

In the face of those ongoing challenges, I wish to emphasize five critical points.

First, we must reinforce international humanitarian law and ensure its rigorous implementation. The Geneva Conventions, their Protocols Additional and Security Council resolutions provide a robust legal foundation for civilian protection. Those legal instruments must be respected and enforced by all parties to conflict. Cambodia calls upon the international community to hold violators accountable and support mechanisms that promote adherence to those legal standards.

Secondly, we must enhance the capacity of peacekeeping missions to protect civilians. United Nations peacekeeping plays a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of conflict on vulnerable populations. Those missions must be adequately resourced, equipped and mandated to prioritize the protection of civilians. Cambodia reaffirms its commitment to supporting those efforts and calls for greater international cooperation.

Thirdly, we must address the root causes of conflict in order to prevent violent outbreaks. Sustainable development, good governance and respect for human rights are integral to building peaceful societies. Cambodia's recovery and development journey demonstrates the transformative power of those principles. We urge all nations to invest in initiatives promoting social cohesion, economic opportunities and the rule of law.

Fourthly, the protection of civilians requires addressing the specific needs of women and children, who are often disproportionately affected by conflict. Gender-based violence, child recruitment and the disruption of education demand our immediate attention. Cambodia is committed to advancing gender equality and safeguarding children's rights, both within our borders and in conflict-affected regions worldwide.

Fifthly, even after a war ends, dangers for civilians can persist. Cambodia established the Cambodian Mine Action Centre to clear landmines left behind by the conflict. Our goal is to make civilians completely safe from landmines by 2025. My delegation takes this opportunity to invite all Member States to attend the fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and

on Their Destruction, to be held from 25 to 29 November in Cambodia, also entitled the Siem Reap-Angkor Summit on a Mine-Free World. I believe that together, we can join hands to free civilians from landmines.

In conclusion, protecting civilians during armed conflict is a moral obligation that transcends national borders and political ideologies. Cambodia's history highlights the devastating impact of war and the enduring significance of peace. Through our dedication to peace and the protection of civilians, we aim to prevent the recurrence of past atrocities.

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

Mr. Tammsaar (Estonia): We thank Mozambique for convening today's debate and the briefers for their presentations.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

As we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions — the cornerstone of international humanitarian law — we regretfully continue to witness an erosion of catastrophic proportions of the exact same principles enshrined in those documents. This year's report by the Secretary-General (S/2024/385) describes an unprecedented scale of violations against civilians across the globe, including in Yemen, the Sudan, Gaza and Ukraine.

The report presents a stark reality — civilian deaths in armed conflicts have increased by 72 per cent compared to the previous year. The number of women and children killed in conflicts have doubled and tripled, respectively. Armed conflicts remain the major driver of global hunger, acute food insecurity and the displacement of civilians everywhere.

Estonia is deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for continued, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access that allows for a continued and sufficient flow of humanitarian assistance. This month, we delivered €120,000 in support to United Nations entities, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, providing humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Since the beginning of the year, we have seen a 40 per cent increase in the number of children killed in Ukraine according to UNICEF, owing to the ongoing barbaric attacks by Russia on civilian infrastructure,

including residential areas, schools and health facilities. We continue to witness Russia's deliberate systematic attacks against the Ukrainian energy infrastructure, posing a threat to millions of civilians. In this situation of total impunity, the deliberate mass violations of international humanitarian law have become a tool in Security Council permanent member Russia's conventional warfare.

Russia's use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including highly destructive glide bombs and land mines, continues to be the primary cause of casualties among the civilian population in Ukraine. Thirty per cent of Ukraine's territory is littered with mines, making it one of the countries most heavily contaminated by mines worldwide. That has seriously limited Ukraine's agriculture and food production and its trade and caused unprecedented environmental damage. That is why Estonia has provided Ukraine with demining equipment and training, and we continue to explore other ways to support Ukraine.

The constant attacks also make it impossible for human rights defenders to gain access and conduct monitoring and reporting, including on conflict-related sexual violence. Estonia therefore strongly welcomes the Security Council's increased focus on tracking developments on the ground through monitoring mechanisms, including on conflict-related sexual violence and on grave violations against children in armed conflict, as outlined in the updated policy brief of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs from April. We also draw attention to the 35 journalists killed in armed conflicts in 2023, as reported by UNESCO. That once again underlines the urgency of implementing resolution 2222 (2015) on the protection of journalists.

To conclude, in the light of the extreme violations of fundamental international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the increase in brutal killings and in the harm done to civilians globally, Estonia echoes the Secretary-General's call for all States Members of the United Nations to redouble their efforts, strengthen compliance by parties to conflict with international humanitarian and human rights law, and ensure accountability. Let us mark the seventy-fifth year of the Geneva Conventions by making a strong recommitment to the principles of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians. It is more important than ever.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, and the delegation of Mozambique on a very successful presidency of the Security Council. We thank you, Sir, for organizing this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and we thank the briefers for their thoughtful insights.

It is 25 years since the Security Council commenced consideration of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. This year is also the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which made explicit the protections for civilians in conflict zones. It is therefore with outrage that we witness the wanton war being waged for the past seven months against helpless Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Thirty-five thousand, mostly innocent women and children, have been killed by the Israeli war machine in this brutal campaign. Two million Gazans have been displaced repeatedly. Humanitarian supplies have been deliberately blocked, humanitarian workers targeted and killed, hospitals, schools and infrastructure destroyed, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — the only United Nations agency fully capable of providing relief to the besieged Gazans — has been deliberately defamed and attacked. Famine and pestilence stalk Gaza.

This plausible genocide, as it has been termed by the International Court of Justice, will forever remain a blot on the world's conscience. It will haunt the perpetrators of this slaughter. It has sullied the reputation of those who were complicit in Israel's crimes by offering impunity to its extremist leadership. The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has sought arrest warrants, including for two of Israel's leaders. That will be a test case for the Court's credibility.

It is difficult to improve protection for civilians when their suppression, exclusion and expulsion are the very object of a military campaign. As in Palestine, a pervasive campaign of oppression has been under way for decades in occupied Jammu and Kashmir, executed by an army of 900,000 troops, acting with complete impunity to impose what is ominously called a final solution to the Kashmir dispute. More than 100,000 Kashmiris have been killed. Thirteen thousand young Kashmiri boys have been abducted and many of them mercilessly tortured. All those Kashmiri leaders seeking freedom and self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, as prescribed by several resolutions of the Security Council, have been incarcerated. Many of those political leaders have died in custody in suspicious circumstances. Extra-

judicial killings continue, and collective punishments are frequent.

Pakistan submitted a dossier to the United Nations with evidence of 2,800 cases of crimes committed by Indian officials against Kashmiri civilians in occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and more than a dozen Special Rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council have expressed deep concern regarding the massive violations in occupied Jammu and Kashmir and have sought investigations. All their requests for access to the occupied territory have been denied.

It is imperative for the Security Council and other United Nations bodies to redress such violations, end foreign occupation and promote the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri and Palestinian peoples. It is essential to address the underlying causes of those conflicts, promote political solutions, ensure the observance of international humanitarian law and end impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Security Council can contribute to that by holding the perpetrators of war crimes accountable, halting weapon supplies to the perpetrators, imposing political and legal consequences on the States and individuals responsible for those crimes and offering protection, including through United Nations peacekeepers, to the civilians suffering under the yoke of foreign occupation.

The adoption of resolution 2719 (2023) was an important milestone in building credible avenues for the protection of civilians, including through peace enforcement. We must build on that example of enforcement action. Apart from political action to resolve disputes and reinforced legal mechanisms to ensure accountability, we must build the capacity of the United Nations and relevant regional organizations, including the African Union, to enforce peace and uphold the protection of civilians in conflict zones, in accordance with the principles and norms of international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

Pakistan looks forward to working towards those objectives within the Security Council and at the forthcoming Summit of the Future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Mukongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time that I address the Security Council this month, Mr. President, I would like to acknowledge your presidency of the Council and assure you of my delegation's full cooperation. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Ms. Joyce Msuya,

Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her vital contribution to this crucial debate.

For my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1267 (1999), on the protection of civilians, coincides painfully with the recent horrifying burial in Goma of the many innocent civilians — mostly women and children — massacred in a cowardly attack on the camp for internally displaced persons in Mugunga, North Kivu, on 3 May by the coalition of Rwandan army troops — the Rwanda Defence Force — and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) who, as is customary for them, deliberately trampled on the rules of international law that govern the conduct of hostilities and designate camps for internally displaced persons as entities that are protected by international law.

As members know, the toll of this extermination of the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo did not start with the most recent massacre in Mugunga. For more than 25 years, the civilian populations of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have been suffering the horrifying barbarity of the Rwandan aggression under the cover of the various pseudo-rebellions that were said to be Congolese but were in reality “Made in Rwanda”, such as the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie, the Congrès national pour la défense du peuple and the first and second iterations of the M-23. More than 11 million people have been killed, and 7.2 million have been displaced. Still by way of illustration, paragraph 7 of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians of 14 May (S/2024/385), which is now before the Council, states that more than 219,000 civilian victims were reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — 219,000 Congolese civilians in 2023 alone. That is scandalous, and it is the reality of the extermination of the populations of my country — the only resource that neighbouring Rwanda has managed to export to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in exchange for the systematic plundering of our strategic minerals carried out by Rwanda, its troops and the M-23 terrorists. But I would like to reassure our aggressors that the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose capacity for resilience they have already gauged, will fight to the end to ensure that every square millimetre of their territory currently occupied by the Rwandan Army is recovered and their sovereignty is totally restored.

Drawing on its painful experience, my country appreciates the concept of the protection of civilians. To that end, it intends to participate fully and

constructively in this debate, which brings hope for the future. My delegation proposes the following.

First, States should renew their commitment to the centrality of the norms on which our collective security is based. Respect for the Charter of the United Nations and the international legal arsenal for the protection of civilians in times of conflict must be strengthened.

Secondly, the Council must give United Nations peace operations crystal clear mandates regarding the protection of civilians in order to prevent crises of confidence between those civilians and the United Nations Blue Helmets called upon to protect them in conflict zones.

Thirdly, the Security Council must remain a platform for the regulation of our collective security, free from selectivity and internal division. This organ must examine and reform itself. It must democratize its working methods if it is to regain its full effectiveness and usefulness.

Fourthly, at the conceptual level, it is imperative to thoroughly rethink the collective strategy for the protection of civilians. Innovative concepts for the protection of civilians that provide better alternatives for dealing with all forms of violence against civilians should be considered.

Fifthly, the United Nations must invest much more with a view to providing optimum support, with a clear focus on the host country's ownership of the protection of civilians. That implies support for the development of a comprehensive national strategy for the protection of civilians and support for security sector reform.

Finally, partnerships must be enhanced at all levels — continental, regional and subregional. Faced with the challenges of emerging technologies, we must innovate in order to adapt and make the best use of those technologies to protect civilians.

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

Mrs. Fyneah (Liberia): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important meeting.

As we observe Protection of Civilians Week, we are reminded of the growing urgency to protect civilians in areas of armed conflict. Recent global events underscore the critical need for coordinated international efforts to uphold peace and security. We are all connected. Instability in one region can affect global safety, as evidenced in the ongoing calamity of

civilian suffering, refugee flows and the violation of human rights laws or crimes against humanity.

My delegation commends the continuous efforts of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, for its dedication to enhancing and fortifying strategies for civilian protection during conflicts. Historic legal frameworks such as resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000), and later 1674 (2006) and 2286 (2016), have set significant precedents for the protection of civilians during conflicts. However, the persistence of deliberate attacks and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas highlight the fact that much remains to be done to ensure compliance with international laws and effectively safeguard civilians.

This year's commemoration of the Protection of Civilians Week occurs amid an increasingly polarized geopolitical landscape, presenting formidable challenges to global peace and security. The complexities of urban warfare and the involvement of non-State armed groups exacerbate those challenges. That is further compounded by inadequate and weak international cooperation and the emerging threats posed by advanced technologies.

In response to those critical issues, Liberia aligns itself with the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385), which emphasizes the urgent need to curtail the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Proudly, Liberia has endorsed the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, a proactive measure, following our own prolonged civil conflicts. That Declaration is instrumental in mitigating harm to civilians and shaping military conduct towards prioritizing civilian protection. We urge other Member States to endorse the Declaration and call upon humanitarian organizations, civil society and affected communities to intensify their advocacy.

The stark reality is that resolutions alone are not enough. Effective action and strict enforcement of international laws are essential to truly protect civilians. This week, let us commit to deep reflection and renew our commitment to cooperative global actions. By ensuring the security and dignity of civilians, we safeguard ourselves and contribute to maintaining international peace and security.

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

Mr. Tun (Myanmar): At the outset, I wish to express my appreciation to the presidency of Mozambique

for organizing this open debate. I thank the briefers for their insightful statements. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385), in which the situation of Myanmar is highlighted.

As we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), this open debate offers an opportunity for Security Council members and the States Members of the United Nations to reflect on the progress and challenges on this agenda as well as to redouble our efforts to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law and enhance accountability for violations thereof. It is imperative for the Security Council to take a responsible role to ensure that the provisions of resolution 1265 (1999) are implemented by holding perpetrators accountable for their violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. If no timely action or accountability measures are taken, it will perpetuate a vicious cycle, wherein the lack of compliance with international humanitarian law is exacerbated by the culture of impunity.

Unfortunately, the people in my country, Myanmar, are witnessing that phenomenon on a daily basis. Since the attempted military coup in 2021, the military junta has brutally killed more than 5,100 people, more than 3 million have been internally displaced and more than 18.6 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. Nearly 90,000 private properties were burned down or destroyed. The military junta deliberately attacked the health sector in Myanmar more than 1,293 times, damaged 343 health facilities and killed 104 health workers.

In addition to committing attacks against humanitarian workers, the military junta has also imposed so-called compulsory organization registration on non-governmental organizations to restrict their movement and weaponize aid. Regarding Myanmar, the Secretary-General highlighted in his report that “the military, contrary to humanitarian principles, made decisions on who would receive assistance and the timing and type of assistance” (*ibid.*, para. 37).

Moreover, the military’s unlawful forced conscription has also pushed many young people into hiding or to flee the country. It was disturbing to learn that in Rakhine state, some Rohingya have been forcefully recruited by the military junta and used as human shields.

In its statement yesterday on the situation in Buthidaung, Northern Rakhine, the National Unity Government called for the cessation of all attacks on civilians and civilian property and for the protection of civilians and property. The military junta is purportedly creating intercommunal conflict by promoting chaos and unleashing large-scale destruction, bombing and aerial attacks on villages. Rakhine, Rohingya and Hindu civilians are being forced to move, and their houses are being burned.

The current trajectory in Myanmar shows the intensification of the conflict, followed by unabated violence and indiscriminate attacks by the military junta against the civilian population. It is clear that the military continues to disregard the demands of the Council by committing more atrocities, with an impunity rooted in the international community’s lack of a mechanism to hold the military accountable. The Security Council should take the initiative of filling the accountability gap by referring the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court and adopting an enforcement resolution as a follow up to resolution 2669 (2022).

I and the people of Myanmar have repeatedly appealed to the international community, in particular, the Security Council, to help save lives by taking effective actions. Regrettably, our voices and appeals have been ignored. The international community and the Security Council have ignored our voices, which has resulted in the deaths of many innocent people, including Rohingya, as well as the destruction of homes, including in Rakhine state. Many are now saying that the international community is also responsible for the deaths of civilians and the failure to protect civilians in Myanmar.

While we await effective action from the Security Council, I wish to request the international community to provide adequate protection for all of our people, including respect for the principle of non-refoulement.

I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the issuance, earlier this month, of the Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Myanmar. In it, the High Commissioner calls on all States to allow civilians fleeing Myanmar access to their territories, to guarantee their right to seek asylum and to respect the principle of non-refoulement at all times. It also calls on States to register all individuals who seek international protection and issue documentary proof of registration to all concerned.

Meanwhile, the National Unity Government continues to emphasize the importance of promoting the protection of civilians and, in March, issued the military code of conduct for the People's Defence Force. Among other provisions, it stipulates that the People's Defence Force shall respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law, that violators shall be seriously charged in accordance with the existing laws, and that they shall not physically, mentally or sexually assault any civilian.

In conclusion, securing compliance with international humanitarian law and enforcing accountability mechanisms are central to the full protection of civilians. The enactment of urgent Council measures to ensure accountability, in conjunction with the restriction of flow of arms, weapons, money and jet fuel to the military junta will help advance our collective aspirations of saving lives, ending the military dictatorship and building a federal democratic union. The Security Council should act now to bring tangible protection to the people of Myanmar.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Beresford-Hill.

Mr. Beresford-Hill: We would like to thank the delegation of the Republic of Mozambique for facilitating our contribution to this vital discussion. We also extend our gratitude to all of the briefers for their insightful presentations.

As we gather for this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, we mark significant milestones: the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999), which first introduced the protection of civilians as an item on the Security Council's agenda, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, foundational texts in international humanitarian law.

As the Secretary-General's most recent annual report (S/2024/385) mentions, the harms that civilians are experiencing include death, attacks on essential infrastructure, conflict-induced hunger, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and conflict-related sexual violence. Those atrocities are evident across all conflict zones. Our response must be comprehensive, and it must be determined.

The Sovereign Order of Malta, with its 900-year mission of aiding those in need, is deeply committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Our humanitarian arm, Malteser International, has been at the forefront of providing aid to civilians affected by conflict, particularly focusing on the needs

of migrants and refugees. Through our extensive network, we offer medical aid, psychological support and essential supplies to those in dire circumstances, working tirelessly to uphold the principles of humanity and impartiality.

We recently heard from our colleagues about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Decades of ongoing conflict there have displaced 7.2 million people internally and forced more than 5.3 million to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. A renewed outbreak of violence this autumn has displaced yet another million people.

In response, the Sovereign Order of Malta is actively engaged in addressing the needs of displaced and vulnerable populations. Our mobile clinics in the camps treat those injured by gunfire and bombs, offering essential medical care in those challenging environments. Approximately 1.1 million children under the age of five and 605,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women are acutely malnourished. Our nutrition centres have seen a quadrupling of severely malnourished children since November 2023. To address that, we are distributing emergency food supplies and strengthening medical care for malnourished children. Furthermore, gender-based violence remains a significant concern, with displaced women and girls at high risk.

The escalating violence and instability in Haiti is causing widespread displacement and suffering, putting civilians at significant risk. The Sovereign Order of Malta has been active in Haiti since 2010, focusing on nutritional assistance, food security and income-generating opportunities, particularly for women.

Despite the challenges, our commitment to supporting the Haitian people remains steadfast and constant. We provide supplementary food to malnourished children and support pregnant women, ensuring long-term food security through sustainable agricultural projects and vocational training. Our teams, active now on the ground, distribute medical supplies and offer health-care services in areas with limited access due to gang control.

Ukraine remains in a state of conflict, resulting in significant civilian casualties and widespread displacement. Since November 2022, three mobile teams have been active, offering psychosocial support to displaced children and young people. This initiative is managed by Malteser International and the Johanniter Order, the German Protestant alliance of the Orders of St. John, and is staffed by the Ukrainian

relief service of the Order of Malta. Those teams utilize six specially equipped vehicles, stocked with materials for group encounters, activities, toys and games for young children, fostering an environment conducive to mental health and support. In addition to medical aid, we distribute food, water and essential supplies and support the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals.

Palestine is one of the world's most challenging environments. Civilians face severe restrictions on movement, lack of access to basic services and ongoing violence. The Order of Malta has a long-standing presence there because we were founded in Jerusalem, with the mission of caring for pilgrims of all faiths and origins.

Despite the ongoing hostilities, our hospital in Bethlehem delivers — even now — more than 4,500 babies annually and is the only facility in the region with an intensive neonatal ward. That hospital serves a catchment area for more than 1 million people and is a critical reference point for women's and children's health. Just last week, Fra' Alessandro de Franciscis, our Minister of Health, along with Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, made a trip through the West Bank into Gaza and reached the parish of the Holy Family for a pastoral visit. There, they met a suffering population, and they encouraged them. They went and delivered a message of hope, telling them that they were not forgotten, that we are in solidarity with their needs and that we support them in the suffering that they are enduring and want to alleviate it as quickly and as soon as possible. That visit is the first in the stage of joint humanitarian missions of the Latin Patriarchate and the Sovereign Order of Malta, aimed at the delivery of life-saving food and medical help to the people of Gaza.

The harms experienced by civilians during conflict are multifaceted and severe. Direct attacks on civilians, the use of human shields, the misuse of protected facilities and the targeting of humanitarian aid workers are unacceptable violations of international humanitarian law. Those actions not only cause immediate harm but also have long-term repercussions on the stability and development of affected regions. That is why it is critical to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law.

International organizations play a crucial role in addressing those issues. It is imperative that we continue to support and strengthen the efforts of civil society and other organizations working on the ground and that we do more to protect the sick and the poor, because

failure to do so is not only an affront to humanity, but it makes a mockery of resolution 1265 (1999).

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

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I thank Mozambique, the President of the Council for the month of May, for convening this open debate.

We are marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1265 (1999) at an inflection point in history. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is considering the issuance of arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant to hold them accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Palestine. It is a welcome development. We welcome the filing of the application for those arrest warrants by the ICC Prosecutor. But the Maldives believes that that is a step that should have been taken much earlier, as the continuous aggression and genocidal acts being perpetrated by Israel are undeniable and apparent. Justice delayed is justice denied.

Governments around the world — and members of the Security Council, too — have a stark choice to make: do they want justice to prevail and to hold the offenders accountable, or do they keep encouraging genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity to continue? We must uphold the rule of law, international human rights and humanitarian law, especially when it is most inconvenient to do so.

Israel's violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War is happening in front of our own eyes. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 40 per cent of Gaza's population, or more than 900,000 people, has been forcibly displaced by Israel in the past two weeks alone. Since 7 October 2023, more than 35,000 people have been killed and nearly 80,000 wounded in Israel's attack on Gaza. Most of them are women and children.

Israel's attacks on civilians are not the result of mistakes in a war. They are the result of its current Government's genocidal ideology. Israel's disregard for civilians has been spelled out by its own ministers and its own soldiers on the front line. Israeli cabinet ministers refer to Palestinians as subhuman. Israeli soldiers chant, claiming that there are no innocent civilians in Palestine. The genocidal intent is glaringly evident in Israel's actions: the blocking of crucial humanitarian aid to Palestine and the deliberate attacks on homes, hospitals and schools.

The Maldives calls on the Security Council to take immediate action to protect Palestinian civilians. The Council needs no reminding of its failure to take action to prevent the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the genocide in Srebrenica in Bosnia in 1995. Members of the Council said in this Chamber then, “never again”. But some 30 years later, we have witnessed — and we are witnessing — genocidal acts being committed again and again by Israel. Israel must be held accountable for its crimes.

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

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of Mozambique for having convened this important annual open debate.

The developments in our region since the fall of 2020 culminated in the end of the 30-year occupation by Armenia of the territories of Azerbaijan and in the restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country, in full accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian and human rights law and the relevant resolutions adopted by the Council in 1993.

The ongoing efforts to normalize relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the basis of mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity inspire hope for a long-awaited sustainable and lasting peace and stability in the region. The Secretary-General and a number of international organizations and Governments welcomed the recent progress achieved as a result of direct negotiations between the two countries. At the same time, the consequences of the war continue to affect civilians. In the liberated territories, we have discovered ruined cities, destroyed and desecrated cultural monuments and a devastated environment. The conflict also turned Azerbaijan into one of the countries most heavily contaminated by mines in the world, with an estimated 1.5 million landmines and an unknown number of explosive remnants of war, posing severe risks to civilians, hindering the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes in the liberated territories and delaying the essential reconstruction and development work there.

Despite the end of the conflict, Armenia has failed to share complete and accurate information about the locations of the minefields it has deliberately laid in civilian areas in Azerbaijan. Yesterday, on the day this open debate was convened, another civilian in my country was killed by a landmine, bringing the number of post-conflict mine victims in Azerbaijan to 360, of whom 68

lost their lives and 292 suffered horrific injuries. Half of them are civilians, including children and women. In total, over the past 30 years, the number of mine victims in Azerbaijan has reached 3,439.

The scale and gravity of the landmine threat in Azerbaijan necessitates urgent, continued and adequate international support for the country’s demining efforts. The need to clarify the fate and whereabouts of some 4,000 missing Azerbaijani nationals is another pressing humanitarian issue. International humanitarian law imposes specific obligations regarding the search for missing persons and the treatment of the dead, including recovering and returning human remains and identifying, mapping and preserving mass graves and other burial sites.

States are under the obligation not only to prevent the most serious crimes but also to punish their perpetrators. That obligation has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Security Council. Thus, in resolution 1265 (1999), the twenty-fifth anniversary of which we mark this year, the Council emphasized the responsibility of States to end impunity and prosecute those responsible for such crimes. In a similar vein, in his most recent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2024/385), the Secretary-General underlined that States should ensure that the commitments to strengthening protection and investigating violations are matched by practical and effective measures.

Azerbaijan has, in full accordance with its national legislation and international obligations, taken concrete steps to investigate and prosecute mass atrocities committed against its civilians and other protected persons during the conflict. However, most of the perpetrators, including those responsible for the genocide against Azerbaijani civilians in the town of Khojaly in 1992, having found a safe haven in Armenia, continue to enjoy impunity. The denial of and ignorance regarding those crimes constitute clear contempt for international law and justice.

In conclusion, regarding the statement made by the representative of Armenia at this open debate, for further progress towards achieving lasting peace and stability in the region, it is critical for that country to strictly abide by its international obligations and stop replicating its false narratives, which are counterproductive to the normalization process.

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

Mr. Abesadze (Georgia): At the outset, let me thank the presidency of Mozambique for convening this important debate.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union, and I would now like to make some additional comments in my national capacity.

The Security Council has a leading role in strengthening the normative framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. With the landmark resolution 1265 (1999) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Security Council set out a holistic and comprehensive agenda for the protection of civilians, aimed at enhancing compliance with international law and ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons, women and children.

We are deeply concerned about the findings of the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/385) that armed conflicts continue to cause vast human casualties, damage and destruction of vital infrastructure and disruption to critical services. Among other conflicts, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has dramatically affected the lives of millions of civilians and has resulted in continued and massive displacement. We strongly condemn the indiscriminate escalated strikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure. We reiterate our call on Russia to comply with the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice of 16 March 2022, to immediately cease the aggression and to completely and unconditionally withdraw all its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine.

The only way to protect civilians in armed conflicts is to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In that context, Georgia remains committed to ensuring the protection of international humanitarian law and human rights law at both the national and international levels. The Government has established a dedicated body and relevant mechanisms to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. At the international level, Georgia actively supports relevant initiatives, such as the political declaration on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflicts and the Safe Schools Declaration. Here, we would also like to welcome the ongoing Protection of Civilians Week for 2024 and to thank its organizers — Switzerland, the Center for Civilians in Conflict, the International Rescue Committee and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

I would like to highlight that the Government of Georgia is determined to protect its civilian population, which is affected by Russia's continuous military aggression, starting from the early 1990s and leading to the full-scale armed attack in August 2008. However, we are unable to protect our population in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia owing to Russia's illegal occupation of those territories. The conflict-affected people living on the other side of the occupation line continue to face grave human rights violations. Restrictions on freedom of movement, the denial of access to health care and the prohibition of education in the native language and other forms of discrimination are among the negative consequences of the Russian occupation. Regrettably, tragic events have become a permanent practice, such as the murder of Georgian citizens Tamaz Ginturi and Vitali Temur Karbaia last autumn by the Russian occupation forces. The practice of the illegal detention and kidnapping of Georgian citizens is intensifying every year. Particularly vulnerable groups are women, elderly, children and people with severe health problems. The illegal occupation and effective control of Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions by the Russian Federation and its responsibility for grave human rights violations there have been legally attested to by the numerous judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and the decisions of the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, while we reiterate our commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, we call on the international community to urge Russia to cease its provocative and destructive actions in the illegally occupied regions of Georgia and to start fulfilling its international obligations, first and foremost those under the European Union-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement, to withdraw its forces from the territory of Georgia and to return all internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes based on the fundamental principles of international law.

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

Mr. Alwasil (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to sincerely congratulate you, Mr. President, on your work at the helm of the Security Council. I wish you every success. I also take this opportunity to very much thank Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the Prevention

of Genocide; and Mr. Hichem Khadhraoui, Executive Director of the Centre for Civilians in Conflict. We thank them for their valuable briefings and the tireless and exceptional efforts that they have been undertaking to protect civilians in armed conflict.

The Security Council is meeting today to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. That coincides with the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption by the Council of resolution 1265 (1999). Those anniversaries are of the utmost importance when it comes to international humanitarian law. They clearly reflect the will, cooperation and keenness of the international community to protect civilians and their fundamental rights during times of armed conflict worldwide.

Resolution 1265 (1999) reaffirms the nexus between the protection of civilians and international peace and security — a genuine achievement in enshrining the competency of the Security Council for upholding the core principles of international humanitarian law. All of us have a duty to see to the implementation of the resolution and surmount all obstacles and challenges that prevent the application of international humanitarian law as a whole.

Almost a century has elapsed since the adoption of the core legal provisions in the area of the protection of civilians and the establishment of legal and humanitarian frameworks that govern war and conflict throughout the world. Unfortunately, we still bear witness to recurrent violations against innocent civilians. We have all taken note of the latest annual report (S/2024/385) of the Secretary-General and the shocking information it contains related to the worsening of violations of international humanitarian law in conflict areas.

As we discuss the issue of the protection of civilians during armed conflict, it is difficult for us to ignore the bloody events taking place in the Gaza Strip. The world has been watching myriad international crimes on a daily basis, including the targeting of civilians, systematic starvation, obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the forced displacement of people, the indiscriminate bombing of civilian infrastructure and medical facilities, the targeting of local and international humanitarian workers and the suffocating siege imposed by the occupying military force. Undoubtedly, all of those practices are clear examples of the collective punishment against the innocent residents of Gaza. To date, there have been more than 35,000 martyrs in Gaza, as well as

more than 79,000 wounded. Those practices constitute a significant shock to the human conscience. Respect for the law on the protection of civilians during armed conflict — under all circumstances — is non-negotiable.

Unfortunately, the Council has remained incapable of carrying out its duties to protect civilians and has been held hostage to tensions, political polarization and narrow interests that have allowed the Israeli war machine to pursue its inhumane practices, while the Council has failed to adopt a number of draft resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. That failure will remain a disgrace in the history of the Council.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates the demand for the Security Council to adopt a draft resolution under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to accept a ceasefire, to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance and to end the brutal aggression against the Palestinian people, as well as to provide the necessary protection for them. We stress that there is a need to compel the occupying Power to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions, with international law and with international humanitarian law, as well as with the two orders recently issued by the International Court of Justice concerning the genocide by Israel against the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will continue its efforts, at all levels and at all international forums to establish peace and security in the region by compelling Israel, the occupying Power, to accept an immediate and lasting ceasefire, facilitate the entry of unhindered humanitarian assistance, end the siege on the Gaza Strip, alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and support the efforts to establish peace in the region and the world.

The President: The representative of India has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Bhalla (India): It is unfortunate that a delegation has chosen to misuse such an important forum to further its own nefarious agenda. We advise that delegation that people living in glass houses should not throw stones at others and that their energies would be better utilized in setting their own house order. Secondly, they should reconsider wasting the time of so many delegations and bodies by misusing platforms such as this.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.