



Security Council

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Letter dated 29 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the Security Council video-teleconference convened on 27 May 2020 on the “Protection of civilians in armed conflict”. Enclosed herewith is a copy of the briefings provided on that occasion by the Secretary-General; the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer; and the former President of Liberia, Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as well as copies of the statements delivered by the representatives of Council members: Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for that video-teleconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Afghanistan, Angola, Armenia, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, the European Union, Fiji, Georgia, Guatemala, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Ukraine and Uruguay.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 2 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/273), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the enclosed briefing and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Statement by the Secretary-General**

I thank the Government of Estonia for convening this debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Protecting civilians must be a joint effort by Governments, civil society and international organizations. I look forward to hearing the views of former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

As we meet today, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic rages on, causing enormous human suffering and additional stress to health systems, economies and communities. Those already weakened by years of armed conflict are particularly vulnerable.

COVID-19 is not only spreading sickness and death; it is pushing people into poverty and hunger. In some cases, it is reversing decades of development progress.

As access to services and safety are curtailed, and as some leaders exploit the pandemic to adopt repressive measures, it has become even more difficult to protect the most vulnerable. This is particularly true in conflict zones, where civilians were already exposed to significant risks.

COVID-19 poses a major threat to refugees and internally displaced people crowded together in camps, and to communities that lack sanitation and health-care facilities. Cases in a refugee camp in Bangladesh and among displaced people in a protection of civilians site in South Sudan underline the importance of including displaced people in preparedness and prevention efforts.

My call for a global ceasefire in March was aimed at ending fighting, so that we can focus on ending the pandemic. A global ceasefire would create conditions for a stronger response to the pandemic and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable people, and would open space for dialogue. I am encouraged by expressions of support.

However, that support has not been translated into concrete action. In some cases, the pandemic may even create incentives for warring parties to press their advantage, or to strike hard while international attention is focused elsewhere. Both scenarios could lead to increased violence, and civilians always pay the price. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya documented at least 58 civilians killed and 190 injured between 1 April and 18 May.

United Nations peacekeeping operations are one of the most effective means of protecting civilians in conflict zones around the world. Our Blue Helmets are now supporting national authorities in their response to the pandemic by protecting health-care and humanitarian workers and facilitating access to aid and protection.

I saw for myself last year how the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo made an important contribution to the successful efforts against the Ebola outbreak in the east of the country. Today the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) is working closely with the authorities and security services to find new ways to serve the population while protecting themselves. MINUSCA police are helping to increase the capacity of the internal security forces to curb the spread of the virus while staying safe.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali is fully engaged to suppress transmission of COVID-19 and control its spread,

while continuing to perform its vital roles of protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the peace agreement.

Where armed conflict continues, COVID-19 makes the protection of civilians more challenging than ever — and our support more important than ever. It is only through respect for human rights and international humanitarian law and refugee law that we can protect civilians, including health and humanitarian workers and infrastructure, and relieve pressure on health systems.

But the prospects are bleak. My latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) shows little progress on the protection of civilians, and on compliance with international law, in 2019. More than 20,000 civilians were killed or injured in just 10 conflicts — in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. This figure, which includes only incidents verified by the United Nations, is just a fraction of the total.

Last year, for the ninth year running, 90 per cent of people killed by explosive weapons in populated areas were civilians. I urge all Governments to make a strong commitment to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.

Tens of thousands of children were forced to take part in hostilities in 2019. Millions of people were displaced as a result of armed conflict. And, at the end of 2019, the International Committee of the Red Cross was handling some 140,000 requests from families of missing people. I commend the Council's adoption, last year, of the first-ever resolution on people missing in conflict (resolution 2474 (2019)), and welcome all efforts to shed light on such tragedies and trigger action.

Women and girls in places affected by conflict were subjected to appalling levels of sexual and gender-based violence. They also suffered targeted attacks, intimidation, abduction, forced marriage and restrictions of movement, based on their sex.

People with disabilities are disproportionately impacted and experience even higher levels of risks in war zones.

Conflict also remains the major driver of global hunger. Of the 135 million acutely food-insecure people in the world, more than half live in countries and territories affected by conflict. We expect COVID-19 to cause a sharp increase in that number.

Throughout the year, humanitarian access was hampered by violence, insecurity and bureaucratic impediments — often in violation of international humanitarian law. Violence against humanitarian workers and assets was widely reported. In Afghanistan, 32 aid workers were killed, 52 injured and 532 abducted. In Yemen, there were nearly 400 incidents of violence against humanitarian personnel and assets. National staff accounted for more than 90 per cent of those killed and injured.

According to the World Health Organization, 199 health-care workers were killed in more than 1,000 attacks in 2019 — a shocking increase from an already inexcusable 794 in 2018. This month's attack on a maternity hospital in Kabul, in the middle of a major global health crisis, makes it even more essential for Member States to take urgent measures to implement Security Council resolutions and protect the provision of medical care in conflict.

Last year marked 20 years since the Security Council added the protection of civilians to its agenda, and the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

The year brought several important initiatives and commitments, including the call to action to bolster respect for international humanitarian law, endorsed by 40 States. Such pledges are an important first step. However, compliance and accountability are essential, but lacking.

I repeat my call on States to develop national frameworks to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict. States must also ensure accountability through strengthened efforts to prevent serious violations of international law by prioritizing investigation and prosecution. I urge all to move beyond rhetoric and close the accountability gap through national legislation and coordinated international action.

My report outlines other actions that require greater global attention.

First, I urge States to review and rethink their approach to urban warfare, committing to the protection of civilians in their doctrine, strategy and tactics. This includes measures to condition arms exports on respect for international humanitarian and human rights law.

Secondly, armed drones are increasingly being used to conduct attacks in many situations of armed conflict, including in Libya and Yemen. We need to reassert the authority of international law over their use.

Thirdly, we must address the legal, moral and ethical implications posed by the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems. It is my deep conviction that machines with the power and discretion to take lives without human involvement must be prohibited by international law.

Finally, we must tackle the malicious use of digital technology to conduct cyberattacks on critical civilian infrastructure. Reports from several countries indicate a rise in cyberattacks on health-care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We must do more to prevent and end these new forms of aggression, which can cause further severe harm to civilians.

Civilians caught up in violence now face a new and deadly threat from COVID-19. The pandemic is amplifying and exploiting the fragilities of our world. Conflict is one of the greatest causes of that fragility.

Protecting civilians requires us to do much more to ensure compliance with international law and accountability for violations. We must also do more to prevent, reduce and resolve conflicts. Sustainable political solutions remain the only way to ensure that civilians are kept safe from harm.

Annex 2

Statement by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer

Secretary-General Guterres's report card (S/2020/366) on the state of protection highlights the enormous violations and the failures to protect men, women and children around the globe. Communities caught in the crossfire of armed conflict suffer shock after shock, violation after violation, until their resilience is threadbare.

I am concerned for people — for the rising number of displaced people, stuck in limbo without any prospect of a lasting solution to their plight, and for the millions of families searching endlessly for their missing loved ones. I am concerned for the urban poor, elderly, detainees, migrants and refugees, women, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and people with a disability.

I am concerned about broken places and systems — the migration and displacement camps and the prisons where human dignity is as absent as clean water and sanitation.

I am concerned about emerging threats — the rapid spread of hate speech; stigmatization of all kinds; and data being misused to suppress or control populations instead of protecting them.

I am concerned about the shrinking space for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian work.

And I am concerned about the behaviour of belligerents and all those who support them — about the violations of human life and dignity caused by persistent disregard or expedient interpretation of international humanitarian law and other international legal frameworks.

In particular, I raise the devastating impact on civilians when explosive weapons with a wide impact area are used in populated areas. The death and destruction left behind by heavy explosive weapons raise serious questions about international humanitarian law compliance and signal the urgent need for a change of behaviour to protect civilians, including by avoiding the use of such weapons in populated areas. A strong, unequivocal political declaration committing States to taking concrete action in that regard would be a good first step. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is working on policy and operational-level recommendations to that end.

The divisions within the Security Council on critical concepts of humanitarian law and work, notably access to populations in need, are increasing suffering on the front lines. While the ICRC takes responsibility for delivering neutral and impartial humanitarian services independently and within the legal framework of the Geneva Conventions, it is the Council's responsibility to facilitate access to populations in need. Council members are obliged to proactively facilitate access and not to pile mountains of bureaucratic and political obstacles on humanitarian organizations.

Council members are not asked to tell humanitarian organizations who is in need, but rather to allow neutral and impartial humanitarian organizations to do independent needs assessments in full transparency. And if there are divisions on whether people in a specific context are in need, I would expect States to allow humanitarians to do their jobs as a default precautionary measure unless imperative security reasons prohibit as much.

International humanitarian laws, principles and concepts have been developed to protect people, not to make a point against political adversaries. I urge Council members to base their policies in this regard on the law, which is the

only reasonable basis for consensus, and to leave political controversies outside of humanitarian concerns.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis is fast threatening to become a protection crisis. At the very time they are needed most, helpers are under attack. Health systems are being targeted and health workers abused. Since March this year, the ICRC has recorded 208 COVID-19-related attacks against health-care targets in more than 13 countries.

The socioeconomic impacts will cause further waves of despair, leaving people facing hunger and poverty exposed to abuse and exploitation. States' responses to the pandemic show the risk that, without checks and balances, emergency health measures can become abusive tools to control a population's movement or withhold services.

We fear that some groups — perhaps those considered to be the enemy — may be excluded from life-saving measures. For example, the distribution of any vaccine in volatile and contested places will be difficult, but it must be available to all equitably.

On a more positive note, States have also stepped up in response to the pandemic, implementing more humane policies. If I have optimism during this bleak crisis, it is because I see the potential for actors to take measures during this crisis that spark a recommitment in support of humanitarian protections. For example, we have seen the safe release from detention of many people deprived of liberty, decisions to regularize non-documented migrants to ensure they can access health care, and the adoption of unilateral ceasefires.

Arms bearers remain engaged with the ICRC in crises, with new opportunities for dialogue and advice arising. As police forces and military personnel are called on to maintain public order, the ICRC has maintained a dialogue with public forces to ensure that international law is upheld when conducting operations. And as part of our broader dialogue with hundreds of non-State armed groups across the world, the ICRC is engaged with Islamist and Salafi scholars in the Sahel on a fatwa on COVID-19, giving guidance on respect for the deceased and on health protocols.

I am also encouraged by the potential for multi-stakeholder responses to influence behaviour. This week, 40 global leaders joined the ICRC's call for Governments to work together to stop cyberattacks on the health sector.

It cannot be overstated that the extreme vulnerability of people in conflict zones to repeated shocks is, in large part, due to States and other belligerents disregarding, over many years, their legal obligations towards populations under their control.

International humanitarian law protects civilian life, essential services and the environment. It prohibits torture and ill-treatment, like rape and sexual violence. It protects those not participating in hostilities and provides special protection for health services and health workers. It protects those living under occupation, those in detention, the missing, the dead and their families, and it prioritizes restoring family links.

Respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances would protect people from the impact of war and shield them against the subsequent health, economic or environmental shock waves.

We call on the Council to ensure in all situations, whether while enforcing exceptional measures in response to public health emergencies or during hostilities or public unrest, that its responses are guided by the utmost respect for the protection

of civilians. We also call on the Council to respect the dignity and rights of the deceased, the families of missing persons and persons deprived of liberty.

We understand that consensus is difficult, but human life and dignity cannot be the price of inertia. We ask that the Council be stronger in word and deed in encouraging better behaviour on the battlefield and ensuring that human life and dignity is protected, without exception.

Annex 3

Statement by Nobel Laureate and former President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

I thank the Council for this opportunity and wish to make a few points I believe to be relevant to our purpose.

The first is to congratulate the President on her country's accession to the presidency of the Security Council, and to commend her on her leadership during this high-level open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also extend special greetings to the Secretary-General and the entire United Nations family as we mark the seventy-fifth year of the formation of this pre-eminent multilateral Organization, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.

Those milestones offer an opportunity for reflection. My hope is that this reflection will further pave the way for increased women's leadership and strengthen our efforts to protect traditionally marginalized and vulnerable groups — often women, children and persons with disabilities — trapped by conflict.

Unfortunately, some conflicts are so protracted that we have seen multiple shifts in the parties concerned, and many people have been born and died without experiencing what it is to be a child or an adult with fulfilled aspirations and rights. Instead, their lives have often been defined, shortened and narrowed by conflicts they had no part in creating. It is time to take bold action, because unless we do so now we will lose many more lives, many others will sustain life-changing injuries and millions more will be forcibly displaced. We must find a way to end this cycle of immeasurable loss and human tragedy.

The truth is that unless we put an end to these ongoing conflicts, there can be no semblance of a just compact between these States and their peoples nor any possibility of addressing the inequalities and injustices that have often fuelled the conflicts — both prerequisites for developmental transformation. Even worse, that opportunity may be lost for generations to come. That is also why I could not agree more with the Secretary-General that “[t]he most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflict” (*S/2020/366, para. 67*).

That brings me to my second point. A conflict averted often does not make the headlines, but it saves lives and livelihoods. In that connection, nothing should weigh more heavily on our collective consciences or on the desk of the Council than the urgent need to stop ongoing conflicts and preventing new ones.

I know that preventing a conflict is never easy, and yet our collective experience shows that it is less costly, if not easier, than ending one. Consequently, whenever peacekeeping mandates need to be changed, we must change them. When missions need to be reassessed, we must reassess them. When the Council needs to be broadened and strengthened to reflect the changing reality of our world, we must adapt and reform it. When individual members are holding the Council back with their narrow self-interests and using the veto power in ways unintended, we must find a workable formula to preserve the collective interests of all. What we simply cannot do is resign ourselves to a sense of hopelessness by settling for and accepting the continuation of numerous situations of prolonged carnage. After all, the United Nations and its many organs, especially the Security Council, represent hope for peace.

Seventy-five years ago, our nations acted with courage to end a global war. The Council now represents the hope and aspirations of the global community for international peace and security. We must find the political will and commitment that has been long absent and we must act now.

Today, our world is beset with more conflicts, the growing threat of violent extremism and a young population that is increasingly less hopeful about the possibility of living in peace. We simply cannot continue this way. It is time for change.

I understand that the United Nations cannot end all conflicts alone. It requires a multitude of actors and commitments, including the involvement of women through the full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), which remains a key ingredient for peace. But I also know that the role of the Security Council is pivotal, especially one that is more representative of all the peoples of the world so as to be more effective in ending and preventing conflicts.

As a Liberian, I am grateful to the Security Council and the larger United Nations for supporting the interventions that helped to broker and bring peace to my country. However, in my country, like in many places of ongoing conflict, the fault lines and signs were visible for many years. Simply put, protecting human rights, ending impunity and engaging in preventive diplomacy are crucial to stopping conflicts before they rage into full conflagrations. We must not ignore the many signals today or delay necessary action to prevent conflict.

Finally, the coronavirus disease pandemic — with more than 5 million infected and more than 300,000 deaths worldwide — is a painful human tragedy. I extend my deepest condolences to all who are grieving for loved ones, and pray for a speedy recovery for those infected.

Yet, even in this period of sadness, we are reminded of many important lessons that may help us prevent conflict and war.

The first is that women's leadership and participation in gender-balanced governance have often made the difference in this fight.

Secondly, we must remember that the virus is a pandemic. Only regional and global solidarity can protect the whole world from further tragedy. From global health and human development to peace and climate change, we need more multilateralism, not less. Only by working together can we overcome our common challenges and make the world safer, better and more peaceful.

Thirdly, excluding impoverished nations from ongoing medical research and the development of needed cures does not mean that wealthier ones can continue to live in a protected bubble.

Fourthly, we face an urgent need to reset the world to higher standards of international cooperation and peace as the most enduring and sustainable path to successfully confronting our common challenges, ending ongoing conflicts and preventing future ones.

This pandemic has humbled us all and it represents our greatest test in living memory. The truth is that it is not beyond our ability to pass this test. However, how we pass it will redefine the course of human history. Let us not fail — for our own sake and that of posterity.

I do not know how many will be infected, how many lives will be lost or where growth projections and human development indices will be when this pandemic ends. But I do know — as if further proof were needed — that we are more connected and interdependent than we have allowed ourselves to believe and that we have

committed to acting together. As others have mentioned, I also know that the world and life as we know it will change. It is now upon us to ensure that those changes are for the better, for the good of humankind.

Indeed, we face the test of a lifetime. May we find the courage, as we did in 1945, to find the answer of a lifetime.

Annex 4**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

China highly commends the initiative of convening this open debate via video-teleconference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We welcome President Kaljulaide to the meeting and thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing. We also welcome the participation of President Maurer and Ms. Sirleaf.

The international community, including the Security Council, has made tremendous efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict. The Council has adopted a number of resolutions and presidential statements in that regard. Nevertheless, our work still faces multiple challenges, compounded by evolving situations of conflicts and new risks, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

As they account for the vast majority of casualties, civilians bear the brunt of wars and armed conflicts. The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2020/366) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict presents a bleak picture of ongoing civilian suffering in armed conflicts. In 2019, the United Nations reported more than 20,000 civilians killed and injured and millions of civilians displaced as a result of attacks in 10 conflicts.

China strongly believes that the paramount importance of protecting civilians in armed conflict can never be overemphasized. We therefore call for in-depth discussions and concrete Council action on this issue.

First, we must address the root causes of conflicts and promote development for peace. That is the best way to protect civilians. In many cases, abject poverty and hunger trigger violence and conflict, which in turn undermine development and exacerbate poverty and food insecurity. Only by addressing the root causes can we break this vicious circle.

Sustainable and inclusive development is key to achieving long-term stability and sustaining peace. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be effectively implemented, with poverty eradication as the first priority. There are only 10 years left for us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It is time for action. China firmly supports the Secretary-General's Decade of Action initiative and calls on the international community to jointly pursue innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development.

Secondly, the Security Council should work tirelessly to prevent and peacefully resolve conflicts through political dialogue, mediation and negotiation. Preventing, de-escalating and resolving conflicts by peaceful means is the most effective way to protect civilians. At present, armed conflict continues in certain areas, resulting in a high number of civilian casualties. We urge all parties concerned to respond positively to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and to move towards political settlement through inclusive dialogue.

The fundamental principles of international law, such as the peaceful settlement of disputes and the prohibition of the threat or use of force, must be upheld. Many prolonged conflicts are a product of violations of the Charter of the United Nations and other basic international law. For example, the people of Syria and Iraq have endured years of suffering due to the use of force unauthorized by the Security Council. That should not happen again.

Thirdly, all parties to conflicts must fulfil their obligation, under international law, to protect civilians. The Geneva Convention, international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1265 (1999),

and other resolutions concerning women, children, medical personnel and missing persons, must be fully implemented. We urge all parties to conflicts to refrain from the asymmetric use of force in densely populated areas. There should be zero tolerance of harming civilians. It is also critical for all parties to give special attention and care to vulnerable groups — particularly women and children — and to facilitate safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

The COVID-19 pandemic civilians in armed conflict at further risk. All parties should prioritize the interests of the people and take proactive measures to combat the virus. Unilateral sanctions severely undermine the capacity of vulnerable countries to respond to the pandemic, thereby exacerbating civilian suffering. We call on relevant countries to lift unilateral sanctions immediately and join global efforts to combat the virus, including by supporting the leading role of the World Health Organization.

China has provided medical assistance and sent medical teams to countries in armed conflict in order to help them fight COVID-19. At the recently held World Health Assembly, President Xi Jinping announced five significant measures to boost international cooperation against the pandemic. We will continue to deliver support to countries in need.

Fourthly, national Governments must bear the primary responsibility to protect their civilians. United Nations peacekeeping operations should work closely with Governments and strictly follow their mandate when fulfilling the responsibility to protect civilians. United Nations agencies and other humanitarian entities need to engage actively with affected Governments and respect their sovereignty so as to develop trust and facilitate humanitarian operations. The guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance, as set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182, must be respected and upheld. The International Committee of the Red Cross has served as a role model in that regard.

Any violation of international humanitarian law, such as threats or attacks against civilians in armed conflict, should be investigated and punished in accordance with the law. Meanwhile, the international community should respect the national judicial system of countries concerned and not impose external measures. We should bear in mind that foreign occupation and interference, terrorist activities, unilateral sanctions and many other factors also lead to civilian suffering, and its perpetrators must be held accountable.

The protection of civilians should not be politicized or used as an excuse for interference in internal affairs or even regime change. Those who invoke international law must also submit to it. The Security Council should adopt a consistent position in all situations on its agenda. Double standards or selective approaches will only damage the authority of the Council.

A human life is of greater value than anything else. We must take a people-centred approach in dealing with any issue on the Council's agenda. It is the moral obligation of the international community to do whatever it can to take pragmatic and effective measures in order to ensure the safety and dignity of civilians in armed conflict.

Annex 5**Statement by the Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic, José Singer Weisinger**

We thank the Secretary-General and President Johnson Sirleaf for their briefings as we explore concrete ways to address the remaining pressing challenges in the protection of civilians in armed conflict as well as the new challenges that are emerging. We also thank Mr. Maurer and, through him, the men and women who are tirelessly working as promoters of the principles enshrined in the Geneva Conventions to protect the life and the dignity of civilians in armed conflict.

In his report (S/2020/366) the Secretary-General refers to the current coronavirus disease pandemic as the “greatest test that the world has faced since the establishment of the United Nations” (*S/2020/366, para. 1*). It is clear for the Dominican Republic that the pandemic has brought many underlying and systemic vulnerabilities to the surface, particularly in countries affected by armed conflict, where the absence of timely and adequate actions to address the root causes of conflict creates greater challenges for the prevention and response measures required to protect the most vulnerable.

And the pandemic adds yet another layer to the suffering of civilians already paying the highest price in so many contexts: the elderly, people living with disabilities, men, children and women living with other underlying diseases, the displaced, refugees, those living in overcrowded internally displaced person camps and those held in detention centres. All people need to be protected — in dignity, justice and solidarity and with respect for their fundamental rights.

Due to the severe impact of the pandemic in conflict-affected countries, we continue to call for sustainable and long-lasting ceasefires in current situations of armed conflict. Attacks on health-care and humanitarian workers, hospitals and schools and the use of explosive weapons in highly populated civilian areas are gross violations of international humanitarian law that clearly undermine the prevention and response efforts aimed at overcoming the pandemic.

The emergence of such atrocious methods of warfare as the use of starvation of civilians and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to affected populations are just a few of the other violations that require our urgent attention and action. Violations to international humanitarian law should not be the norm; they should be the exception.

We agree that respect for international law and accountability for serious violations are the two most pressing challenges to strengthening the protection of civilians. Without concrete actions in these areas, we will have little ability to make progress in building a culture of protection across the entire United Nations system, embracing, inter alia, parties to conflict, humanitarian organizations, United Nations peacekeeping and political missions and national armed forces, in order to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict. This is our collective responsibility.

In recent years, and despite the calls of international organizations and States Members of the United Nations, urban warfare has continued to have a devastating impact on civilians and critical civilian infrastructure. We join others in reiterating the necessity of all parties to conflict to immediately refrain from using urban settings as battlefields. Such use provokes massive displacements and has an increased and disproportionate impact on women and children.

Allow me to highlight some additional points that require our decisive attention when considering this critical issue.

There is mounting evidence that conflict-affected populations are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. At the same time, climate change acts as a risk multiplier, when competition for scarce resources becomes the root cause of conflict and violence between communities. For instance, the combination of conflict, extreme weather events, economic shocks and natural disasters is a major factor in food insecurity and mass displacement. Accordingly, for the Dominican Republic, it is crucial that we achieve a better and more holistic understanding of how these factors interact and come up with possible actions to strengthen the protection of those affected by them.

The protection of civilians is not a one-size-fits-all issue. The United Nations system, including its peacekeeping and political missions, needs to be equipped to address the specific protection needs of the populations it serves, particularly, and most important, in armed conflict.

Annex 6

Statement by the President of the Republic of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid

First of all, I thank the briefers for their comprehensive and insightful briefings.

My statement today starts with a confession: I feel helpless — and responsible for not being able to do more to put things right.

Europe in the twenty-first century is sitting on the safe side of the conflict line in Ukraine, taking in some of the 1.4 million Ukrainians who have fled the war in that country. But some 3.5 million Ukrainians have been left behind, in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Visiting an International Migration Organization shelter in order to try to comprehend the suffering of the minors gathered there, some bearing wounds that life should never have inflicted on young people to begin with, I feel inadequate. All the things I have brought them feel inadequate too. All of us leaders, collectively, feel so inadequate. When I look into these young people's eyes, which are full of acceptance of their fate, I cannot fully comprehend. Time stands still at this point in their personal timelines, where the past was suffering and the future is insecurity.

Estonia has put the principles of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, at the centre of our work in the Security Council. The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2020/366) indicates that the normative framework for the protection of civilians is not really working in real life. Indeed, we have inadequately implemented what we have already agreed. The pandemic adds a new layer of risk that we must develop the ability to mitigate.

Estonia supports the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Security Council must really do something on this subject, making sure at least that State actors heed the call. I am particularly concerned about the most vulnerable — women, children and adolescents.

In Africa, midwives are presented daily with fears of becoming infected with various diseases, not just COVID-19, while attending to mothers. Patricia Mwenyeheri, a midwife in Malawi, has access to only one hand-washing basin in her maternity ward. Is this adequate? Two weeks ago, a four-year-old girl was raped in Mogadishu. Is this gruesome sexual violence acceptable?

Tomorrow a virtual "Every Woman, Every Child" high-level round table will discuss what can we do specifically in these trying times, when the only positive is that the health threats people constantly face in less developed parts of the world that are ravaged by conflict are more palpable for all of us because of COVID-19.

Estonia has contributed to the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan and to the International Red Cross appeals.

In Libya, 221 schools are non-functional. Unlawful attacks against schools, universities, students and teachers are frequent in conflicts around the globe.

In February, journalists Abdel Nasser Haj Hamdan and Amjad Aktalati were killed in an air strike on Idlib while they were providing us with primary-source information about the conflict in Syria.

We must protect civil society organizations and human rights defenders. They are our partners, and in delivering on their mandates, are risking their lives.

The war has an ever-changing face — urbanization of conflict, climate change — but the new aspects confirm the significance of the fundamental framework of international law.

New technologies can improve humanitarian assistance. Artificial intelligence is already reuniting lost family members separated by conflict, as people participating in the Red Cross Trace the Face website can attest.

At the same time, we have seen cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure, including health care. Existing international law therefore needs to be applied to cyberspace, and cybersecurity must be made part of both conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Estonia has promised to bring cybersecurity to the Security Council, and I believe we have delivered on that promise.

The Council has a number of tools at its disposal to enhance compliance with international law and ensure accountability: investigative and judicial mechanisms, peacekeeping-mission mandates and targeted sanctions. These tools need to be applied consistently across all conflict situations. When it comes to sanctions, we observe with concern how the global pandemic is used as a pretext to call for their termination. Sanctions are built so as not to hinder humanitarian aid. There are other developments that do.

Estonia calls for unimpeded humanitarian access in Syria. All arguments not to extend the cross-border mechanism in July do not correspond to the reality on the ground.

We must value accountability. Member States must cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court. United Nations monitoring missions also raise valuable awareness about the perpetrators in conflicts and their actions on the ground.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly pointed to the key element of political will in moving from normative commitments to actual improvement in the protection of civilians. It is sometimes hard to comprehend how blatantly lacking this will can be. Each and every time I hear that we could not agree on wording in the Security Council I see in my mind's eye that girl with one hand, trying to care for her little sister — an image of pure, innocent suffering. Aided by international law and good people around the world, we are powerful together if we want to be.

Annex 7**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

I thank the Estonian delegation for today's debate and welcome the participation of the President of Estonia. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2020/366) and express appreciation to the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, and former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for their briefings.

Civilians are the target of unacceptable violence. From Afghanistan to Libya, from South Sudan, Mali and the Central African Republic to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and from Yemen to Iraq, tens of thousands of civilians have been killed or injured and millions forcefully displaced. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has exacerbated the vulnerability of the most vulnerable in conflict zones, in particular refugees and displaced persons. Together with Tunisia, we will continue our efforts within the Security Council to support the Secretary-General's call for a cessation of hostilities to facilitate the fight against the pandemic.

The Security Council has developed tools to address the protection of civilians in a more systematic and effective manner.

First, the Security Council has repeatedly condemned violations committed by all parties. We regret that the Security Council has not been able to condemn violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law taking place in Myanmar and Syria. It is absolutely necessary that the Security Council renew the cross-border mechanism and that populations in need, including in the north-east of Syria, be able to receive aid through the most effective and direct routes.

Secondly, the Security Council has mandated peacekeeping operations to protect civilians, which are carrying out their mandate in a more robust and innovative manner. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic has developed three surge teams composed of police and civilian personnel specialized in the protection of civilians. These teams can be deployed in hotspots. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali has set up temporary bases close to civilian populations to strengthen social cohesion.

The protection of civilians has become key when assessing the performance of United Nations missions. Unfortunately, women and girls continue to be subject to appalling sexual and gender-based violence, and children continue to be recruited by armed groups. It is paramount that United Nations missions be given sufficient capacity and human resources to respond to their specific needs.

I will now turn to four challenges.

First, the issue of attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel is particularly worrisome in the context of COVID-19. Parties to armed conflicts must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect humanitarian and medical personnel and units and to ensure humanitarian access. The Humanitarian Call for Action, initiated by France and Germany last September, addresses this issue through different concrete commitments. France is planning to launch a national plan of action aimed at strengthening international humanitarian law training of State and non-State actors. We encourage all Member States to sign onto the Humanitarian Call and welcome the endorsements of the Call by Chile and the Maldives, bringing the number of signatories to 45.

Secondly, there is the question of the use of weapons, which is addressed in the Secretary-General's report. Much of the harm and destruction in current conflicts appears to be the result of violations of international humanitarian law provisions including, but not limited to, the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

France is engaged in the ongoing negotiations towards the development of a political declaration to improve the protection of civilians. To that end, this political declaration must address the issue of the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons. But the declaration will not stigmatize explosive weapons alone. Indeed, the declaration must affirm that the core challenge is to improve the implementation of international humanitarian law principles by promoting appropriate policies and practices for the conduct of military operations in urban contexts and by encouraging States to exchange good practices.

France is also engaged in efforts aimed at addressing the possible challenges associated with the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems. Substantial progress has been made through the work of the dedicated Group of Governmental Experts, which includes the adoption of 11 guiding principles reaffirming that international humanitarian law continues to fully apply to all weapons systems.

Thirdly, it is crucial that the protection of journalists in armed conflict become effective. We commend the four Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists and their efforts to support the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions.

Finally, we must redouble our efforts aimed at supporting justice for victims. The arrest in France two weeks ago of Félicien Kabuga, one of the highest-profile remaining fugitives indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, is a reminder that those responsible for mass atrocities can be brought to justice.

France will also continue to support the fight against impunity of perpetrators of atrocities committed in Syria, through national proceedings and support for the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

Annex 8**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi**

I thank the President for organizing today's important meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their insights.

Last year, I presided over the open debate that commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the protection-of-civilians agenda and the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions (see S/PV.8534). Our message at that time remains relevant today, particularly during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Council must continue exercising its moral weight to protect civilians in armed conflict. Indeed, the pandemic has not stopped conflicts from playing out in many parts of the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, violent attacks increased by 37 per cent between mid-March and mid-April. Armed conflict has also displaced at least 661,000 people over the past two months. COVID-19 places an extra burden on the shoulders of people in conflict-affected countries and complicates our efforts to protect civilians.

Against that background, I have three key messages.

First, it is important to implement a humanitarian pause. The pandemic provides the momentum to put a break on the fighting. Laying down weapons would ensure unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance, create a space for credible peace processes and allow us to focus on fighting COVID-19. For those reasons, Indonesia reiterates the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire in all conflict situations, including Afghanistan. Together with Norway, Germany, Qatar and Uzbekistan, Indonesia launched a joint statement on a ceasefire in Afghanistan. A global ceasefire requires political will, putting aside animosity, as well as unity in the Council.

Secondly, it is critical to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law at all times. All parties to conflict must honour their obligations. Civilians are not targets. Greater protection must be given to those who are already in dire situations, women, children, refugees and displaced persons. Continued attacks on health-care facilities in conflict-affected countries further impairs their already fragile capacity to fight COVID-19. This has to stop.

Palestine is a textbook example of where compliance with international humanitarian law is desperately needed now. The ongoing imminent threat of annexation and the COVID-19 pandemic have hit Palestine together. The world and the Council have a duty to restore the Palestinians' rights over their territory in accordance with the 1967 borders. We must not let further annexation happen from various standpoints. It will threaten regional stability and security. It will undermine the two-State solution. It will do away with all international consensus and parameters on the issue of Palestine. Moreover, it will shift the world's focus away from fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thirdly, it is also crucial to place women's empowerment at the heart of the protection of civilians. Indonesia is a strong proponent of community engagement in protecting civilians. Local communities, particularly women, must become part and parcel of the development and implementation of the protection of civilians strategy. As agents of civilian protection, women have greater access to communities. Women are essential enablers of trust- and confidence-building and help to prevent and reduce conflict and confrontation. Inclusive participation of women would also benefit any peace process as they have a unique perspective to offer. Empowering women means empowering the whole nation.

That was evident when I led Indonesia's women leaders in dialogue with Afghan women in Kabul last February to encourage their greater contribution in the peace process. The Afghanistan Indonesia Women's Solidarity Network was launched during the visit. Later this year, we aim to establish a southeast Asian network of women peace negotiators and mediators. Indonesia is also committed to increasing the number of female peacekeepers, thus contributing to gender parity among Blue Helmets. There are currently 154 Indonesian women peacekeepers on the ground, all of whom will contribute to the implementation of mission mandates around community engagement and the protection of civilians.

COVID-19 is unlike any global crisis in the United Nations 75-year history. However, during this dark moment of our time, we cannot neglect the imperative to protect civilians in armed conflict. After all, the United Nations was established to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Protecting civilians is one of the most important tasks to avoid us failing.

Annex 9**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

Allow me first to congratulate you on the choice of this topic, which is particularly important for your presidency of the Security Council.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia. I thank Secretary-General António Guterres, as well as Her Excellency Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Mr. Peter Maurer, for their statements.

As mentioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the protection of civilians in armed conflict has always been the concern of the United Nations and its Member States. It has now been two decades since the Security Council put that topic on its agenda, thus officially recognizing it as a matter of international peace and security. Resolution 1265 (1999), the Council's first resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, established the parameters of what is today considered a guiding principle on the issue.

Two months have passed since the Secretary-General called for a global humanitarian ceasefire in the wake of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). However, the situation on the ground in many conflict areas is deteriorating at an alarming rate, especially for women, children, the elderly and those with disabilities. In recent weeks, women and babies have been massacred in Afghanistan. Sub-Saharan Africa, for its part, has seen a 37-per cent increase in violence, with dozens of civilians killed in Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso. Fighting continues in Yemen and Syria, causing casualties and displacement. In Libya, the already grave situation is at risk of deteriorating further with the over-armament of the protagonists, in flagrant violation of the embargo imposed by the Council itself.

In the face of those various tragedies, the members of the Council continue to maintain their divergent positions instead of adopting a posture of unity that would have sent a clear message to the various actors committing the violence. Moreover, in those two months, armed conflicts forced more than 660,000 people around the world to flee violence, making them more vulnerable to infection and further complicating the global fight and recovery efforts against the virus. The Sahel and Lake Chad region has seen a sharp increase in the number of internally displaced persons, with Chad and the Niger being the most affected. The region is plagued by all kinds of attacks carried out through asymmetric warfare that spares neither the defence and security forces of our countries nor even peacekeepers, let alone civilians.

The Niger would like to stress that, with regard to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, respect for and the promotion and implementation of international humanitarian law and other applicable legal and political frameworks by both State and non-State actors are essential. In that regard, I would like to reaffirm the Niger's deep commitment to the principles of human rights and its adherence to the international legal instruments for the protection and promotion of those rights, as signed and ratified by our country and promoted by the President of the Republic of the Niger, His Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou.

Respect for the law of armed conflict is particularly important, especially by the armed forces, which are responsible for ensuring full application in theatres of operation. To that end and with the aim of integrating those international commitments into the doctrine of its armed forces, the Niger, in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross, has developed a manual on international humanitarian law for its defence and security forces. In the same vein, the Niger fully subscribes

to the human rights compliance framework in the context of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, in particular pillars 4 and 5, relating to the integration of the protection of civilians into the planning and conduct of operations and the feedback to assess the impact of operations on the population. Respect for the law of armed conflict cannot be complete unless perpetrators and offenders are held accountable for their actions before the courts.

In this time of crisis, we must ensure that the public health response to the pandemic and respect for fundamental legal protections complement each other. As mentioned by the International Committee of the Red Cross, that can be done only by facilitating unhindered humanitarian access for medical personnel and humanitarian workers, protecting access to food and water, protecting vulnerable persons and detainees and ensuring access to education for children, especially for young girls. As the current pandemic requires the mobilization of resources, both economic and humanitarian, countries in armed conflict often lack the means to deal with the situation. We would like to echo the Secretary-General's statement that it is time to show solidarity, not exclusion and to call for economic mitigation measures and humanitarian exemptions wherever necessary.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the role of peacekeeping missions at a time like this is particularly crucial. In Mali, for example, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali, Mr. Mahamat Annadif, stressed in his recent briefing to the Council (see S/2020/286) that exemplary cooperation has been established between the United Nations system and the Government of Mali in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. We should encourage and welcome such a commitment, which strengthens strategic communication to counter disinformation and rumours.

We should also bear in mind that the success of the protection of civilians lies in an inclusive consultative process that is locally owned and engages local communities, as we saw in the recent debate organized by Ireland on the issue of pastoralism in the Sahel. Such people-centred peacekeeping should take into account the voices of women, youth, political parties and civil society. Only thus can lasting solutions be achieved as they would be based on a participatory process that would then be accepted and shared by all.

Annex 10**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Gennady Kuzmin**

I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Maurer and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for their contributions to today's meeting.

Indeed, the work of the Security Council over the years has helped to strengthen the protection of civilians, thereby saving lives. Unfortunately, despite all our efforts, thousands of civilians, especially women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, continue to suffer. To our great regret, the unprecedented politicization of the humanitarian issues in international relations still dominates.

Now, the plight of civilians is becoming even harsher, the threats and challenges they are facing are multiplied owing to the unprecedented global health crisis, coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which indeed leaves no one behind. It is high time to unite our efforts to achieve the noble goals of protecting people and minimizing their suffering. In that regard, we find the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire of 23 March highly relevant. But his call would be incomplete without reference to his appeal to waive sanctions, which can undermine countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic. The same appeal was made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who stressed that, in the context of a global pandemic, the policy of impeding medical efforts in one country heightens the risk for all of us.

We agree that protecting health-care workers and facilitating access for humanitarian assistance are important in the fight against COVID-19. But the fight will not be effective if there is no access to essential health-care services or to good quality, safe, effective and affordable essential medicines, vaccines, personal protective equipment and food. International cooperation and solidarity might not be inclusive or exhaustive while unilateral sanctions remain in effect.

Let me refer to the situation in Syria, where suffocating sanctions afflict ordinary Syrians, including by preventing the authorities from purchasing necessary medical equipment and by intimidating international humanitarian non-governmental organizations, which fear penalties. Yes, I refer to civilians — women and children — about whom many of my colleagues like to speak so much in the Council and who suffer the most from the coercive measures imposed by their countries.

Coercive measures can be even more shameful when they are used by a Government against its own people. And now I am referring to Ukraine. Kyiv continues to pursue its brutally repressive policy towards Donetsk and Lugansk, which has already negatively affected more than five million civilian residents of the conflict area, has deprived hundreds of thousands of pensioners of access to their pensions and has prevented access to education and health services. Again, our Western colleagues prefer to not pay attention and shift responsibility.

Armed conflicts in various parts of the world remain a reality, though their nature has been changed by new threats and potential dangers, such as increased activity by terrorist groups, which use modern communication technologies, and the spreading practice of using combat drones. The answer to the problem is full respect for international law, and first and foremost, international humanitarian law. We concur with the Secretary-General on the importance of safeguarding the authority of international humanitarian law. The norms of international humanitarian law should not be used for political manipulation. There is no need to develop new international legal concepts that allegedly fill so-called gaps in the protection regime. In practice, such ideas can only weaken the protection we give civilians. We are convinced that

implementation problems lie not in the weakness of international humanitarian law, but in the disinclination or reluctance to implement its principles and norms in practice.

I would like to also touch upon the issue of accountability. Nobody argues the importance of taking measures to bring to justice those responsible for the most heinous crimes. However, we can neither share the positive assessments of the work of the International Criminal Court nor support the call for increased cooperation with it. We have expressed in detail our position on the activities of the Court on many occasions. Since then, unfortunately, nothing has changed. The Court has proven to be the wrong instrument to fight the most severe crimes under international humanitarian law.

We have repeatedly said that, for a civilized level of criminal prosecution, reports by non-governmental organizations alone and information from other so-called reliable but never disclosed sources are not enough. Numerous international investigation mechanisms work under the very same principle, sometimes without even entering the country where the crime was committed. It makes a mockery of justice when such information-gathering structures are imposed, against the will of the State concerned. By establishing them through an illegitimate decision, they are themselves illegitimate. I am talking, first and foremost, about the so-called International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and similar initiatives.

I would like to end by recalling the words of the Secretary-General whereby the COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest test the world has faced since the formation of the United Nations and severely impacts the protection of civilians. In order to pass that test we all, namely, Security Council members, should put aside fleeting differences, egoism, messianism and the temptation to pursue their interests to the detriment of others and should work together to ensure peace and security for all.

Annex 11**Statement by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Regional Integration of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sir Louis Straker**

I wish to thank Her Excellency Ms. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, for her opening statement. I also welcome the insightful briefings from Their Excellencies Secretary-General António Guterres, Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and member of The Elders, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Protecting civilians from the harsh realities and consequences of armed conflict is a central priority of our international system. Yet, as conflicts become more complex and dynamic in nature, our efforts to protect civilians are increasingly tethered to this multidimensional-threat landscape. The scale of attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure remains unacceptably high, particularly in densely populated settings where urban warfare is a defining feature of armed conflict. High numbers of civilian fatalities and injuries, forced displacement, conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls in particular, but also men and boys, and grave violations against children, including abduction, forced labour and recruitment to armed groups, are also equally appalling. The situation for civilians is exacerbated by the denial of humanitarian access and attacks against peacekeepers and members of civil society working to alleviate the impact of conflict, as well as deepening social and economic inequality in many conflict-affected States.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to amplify an already dire situation for civilians, especially those in internally displaced persons camps with compromised access to health care, proper nutrition and sanitation. With lockdown measures impeding humanitarian service delivery and heightening exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines emphasizes that COVID-19 mitigation strategies must centre on the diverse socioeconomic needs of civilians in conflict-affected areas.

The urgent and ever-growing challenges of the climate crisis further compound the protection of civilians agenda. We are all aware of the increasing accounts of extreme weather phenomena, including erratic precipitation, flooding, prolonged heat waves and desertification, affecting countries from the Sahel to the greater Horn of Africa. This is further compounded by the expanding desert locust infestation. These challenges lead to increased vulnerability, intensify food insecurity and forcibly displace many at-risk populations in situations of conflict. The complications of climate, conflict and COVID-19 must be systematically and simultaneously addressed to ensure durable security and development outcomes for all civilians in these regions and beyond.

Efforts to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of civilians must adhere to the principles enshrined in international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines strongly condemns the ongoing and flagrant violations of this body of international law, established to secure the dignity and well-being of all persons.

We recall all relevant Security Council resolutions that embed the protection of civilians agenda in our efforts to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuance and recurrence of armed conflict. We also emphasize that human dignity must remain the cornerstone of any credible attempt to promote lasting peace and security.

As we contemplate the calls for greater specificity in the protection of civilians agenda to reflect the diverse groups and individuals affected by armed conflict

versus the supposed threat of fragmentation of this agenda, let us not renege on our collective responsibility to all humankind. The exigencies of our time demand precision, care, specificity, prudence and inclusivity to achieve the transformation envisaged by those civilians on whose behalf we serve.

Annex 12**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Jerry Matjila**

It has been an honour to have Her Excellency Ms. Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, address the Council today. I wish to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, for his annual report on the protection of civilians (S/2020/366), which underpins our discussions today. I wish to also thank Mr. Peter Maurer and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia, for the opportunity for us to benefit from their knowledge and experience in the field of the protection of civilians.

Our discussion on the protection of civilians is taking place at a time when we are faced with, arguably, the biggest global challenge since the end of the Second World War. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted all of us, irrespective of our levels of development and whether or not we are experiencing conflict. However, countries in conflict will require additional support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the population, in particular, internally displaced persons and refugees, who will be in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

Armed conflicts continue to have a devastating impact on civilians, with millions being forced from their homes and thousands killed or injured. Children are growing up knowing nothing else but war, while women and girls continue to be subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of violations. Access to humanitarian assistance is being compromised, with the destruction of hospitals, attacks on medical transport and essential services and the military use of medical facilities and schools having become common place in countries experiencing conflict. It is important that the protection of civilian facilities maintain their civilian character and not be misused by parties to a conflict.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic is further compounding efforts aimed at protecting civilians. In this regard, South Africa wishes to reiterate its full support for the call by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire in order to focus on the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Security Council is mandated to maintain international peace and security. If innocent children, women and men continue to suffer on our watch and the Council fails to take meaningful action, we will be failing in the responsibility entrusted to us. It is regrettable that the plight of civilians in protracted conflict situations, such as in Palestine and Western Sahara, seems not to receive adequate attention and that accountability for violations against civilians in these territories is lacking.

The protection of civilians during armed conflict is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. South Africa underlines that the primary responsibility of States is to protect civilians within their borders. In this regard, we reiterate our call on all parties to armed conflict, State and non-State actors, to comply with the obligations applicable to them under international humanitarian law and to take the required steps to protect civilians.

In order to deter the threats to civilians and foster greater compliance with international humanitarian law, we believe that the necessary accountability mechanisms at the national level are essential. Broader regional and international mechanisms should continue to support these, based on the principles of complementarity and subsidiarity.

United Nations peacekeeping is one of the most recognized mechanisms for the protection of civilians. Peacekeeping operations, whatever their mandate, are essential to ensuring the protection of civilians. However, it is also important to

recognize the changing environment in which peacekeepers currently operate and the emerging threats to international peace and security in order to execute the protection of civilians mandate. Needless to say, we should ensure that the protection of civilians mandate is adequately funded. If the Council is going to issue mandates to protect civilians, we have to provide the necessary resources to those executing the mandate.

Finally, greater coordination and cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, such as the African Union, which continues to develop its framework on the protection of civilians for its own peace support operations, are necessary to create an enabling environment for the protection of civilians. The comparative advantage of regional organizations can enable closer collaboration and coordination with local communities, including creating the necessary environment for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons on a voluntary basis and in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement.

Annex 13**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, Nouredine Erray**

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this high-level open meeting on such a highly important topic as the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate Estonia on a successful presidency of the Security Council this month, despite the difficult work conditions imposed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

I would like also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his comprehensive briefing and report (S/2020/366) and commend his leadership and tireless efforts to uphold the protection of civilians, especially in this particularly difficult COVID-19 context, which severely impacts populations already afflicted by conflicts, including refugees and displaced people, as well as those living under occupation.

My thanks and appreciation go also to Mr. Peter Maurer for the long-standing commitment and action of the International Committee of the Red Cross related to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and other situations of violence for more than a century. I salute the participation in this meeting of the Nobel Peace Laureate Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a leading actor in the promotion of peace, justice and democratic rule.

It is important on such occasions to recall that protection for the civilian population is a basic element of humanitarian law. Civilians not taking part in hostilities must, on no account, be attacked and should be spared and protected.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols contain specific rules to protect civilians. In situations that are not covered by these treaties, such as cases of internal violence, civilians remain legally protected by other instruments of international law, mainly human rights law, as well as by national laws compatible with international laws and by the principle of humanity.

Unfortunately, despite this adequate and comprehensive legal framework, today's reality shows that the civilian population continue to suffer most from the consequences of armed violence. In the various ongoing conflicts, whether in Africa, the Middle East or elsewhere, civilians are increasingly caught up in hostilities, including in urban populated areas. Even worse, in many instances, we witness military operations by armed groups deliberately targeting civilians as a retaliation for perceived support to their adversaries.

The Secretary-General's report contains disturbing information about tens of thousands of civilians killed, physically injured or traumatized in 2019. It reveals that millions of people continue to be forced from their homes or displaced. It is regrettable to recognize also that conflict-related sexual violence persists in many armed conflicts, where women and girls, in particular, are still subject to appalling sexual violence. It is equally deplorable to acknowledge that conflicts continue to have a devastating impact on children, as tens of thousands of boys and girls are being forced to take part in hostilities, including on front lines, and are being exposed to a multitude of other violations, including killing, maiming and sexual violence.

The protection of civilians may even deteriorate under COVID-19, a context that might be seen by some parties to conflicts as an opportunity to strike while Governments and the international community are absorbed by the health crisis. Such a scenario could lead to increased violence and civilian suffering.

We have to admit that more than 70 years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions and more than 20 years after the Security Council added the protection

of civilians to its agenda, the results are way below expectations. The truth is that the terrible suffering that continues to be inflicted upon civilians caught up in armed conflicts is due not to an inadequate legal framework, but to poor compliance by actors and an absence of accountability for serious violations. Such suffering would be highly diminished if parties to conflicts respected international humanitarian law and international human rights law or if perpetrators of serious violations were held accountable.

The lack of action against violations of international humanitarian law has unfortunately led to the perception of a free ride for parties to a conflict to commit atrocities. As a party to the Rome Statute, Tunisia is strongly committed to the fight against impunity and reiterates its full support to the International Criminal Court to investigate, prosecute and try individuals accused of committing the most serious crimes of concern to the international community. Criminal justice is badly needed to prevent the recurrence of violations of international humanitarian law. Justice should be based on credible investigation and prosecution, and not be subject to politicization.

A number of other factors have also contributed to the deterioration of the protection of civilians, including the growing intercommunal, ethnic and religious tensions and violence, the increasing involvement of armed groups and non-State actors in the conduct of hostilities, including foreign terrorist fighters and mercenaries, the widespread availability of weapons, mainly as a result of illicit trafficking in small arms and violations of arms embargoes, in addition to the use of armed remotely piloted aircraft or drones by an increasing number of States and some non-State armed groups to conduct indiscriminate attacks in places such as Libya, Somalia and Yemen. We believe that it is urgent to initiate a debate around the growing acquisition and use of armed drones in order to address concerns not only over compliance with international humanitarian law and accountability, but also over their use by non-State actors in terrorist activities.

Beyond calling for promoting respect for international humanitarian law and accountability, the protection of civilians requires that we strive to put an end to the hostilities and silence the guns everywhere. In this regard, we reiterate our full support for the call launched on 23 March by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire. We believe that the Security Council has a moral obligation to support this call, particularly in the COVID-19 pandemic context, and we look forward to the unanimous adoption of the draft resolution presented by Tunisia and France in this regard.

However, stopping hostilities is not enough. It is also our responsibility to find durable solutions to many protracted conflicts and disputes, which continue to inflict suffering upon civilians in the Palestinian territories, Libya, Yemen and many parts of Africa. It is our responsibility, too, to ensure full compliance with arms embargoes and prevent the flow of arms, which perpetuates hostilities and leads to more civilian casualties. It is our responsibility to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict and to address its root causes before hostilities take the lead over preventive diplomacy and before it is too late to save civilians.

To conclude, let me say that ensuring the protection of civilians needs a united Security Council take up its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security more efficiently. It needs its members to prioritize the global common interests of the international community. It needs all of us to uphold our commitment to multilateralism and to the Charter of the United Nations. As an elected member, Tunisia will spare no effort during its mandate to contribute to these goals.

Annex 14

Statement by the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the United Nations, Lord Ahmad

I thank our briefers, Peter Maurer, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and, of course, Secretary-General Guterres.

The stark reality of today's debate is that despite all our efforts — our collective efforts — civilians still bear the brunt of conflict. States have the primary responsibility to protect civilians, but too often they and other parties to conflict flout their obligations. The indirect consequences are death, injury, violence against children, torture and much more.

In this year's report (S/2020/366), the Secretary-General has again noted the appalling use of sexual and gender-based violence and attacks on places of worship. As the British Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, and also as Minister for Human Rights for the United Kingdom, I can assure the Security Council that our commitment to leading global action to tackle these horrific crimes and support all survivors remains solid. It remains steadfast.

When the United Nations emerged from the ashes of global conflict 75 years ago, we all collectively resolved to end such horrors. The United Nations has since become the heart of our international system based on our shared values and rules. Together, we have developed responses to conflict and measures to protect civilians, and we now recognize that our interventions must go beyond physical pain and that we must protect access to basic services and address psychological harm and, indeed, family separation.

One of the most pivotal steps we have taken together was the establishment of the Blue Helmets and the Blue Berets, deploying peacekeeping missions and special political missions to conflicts all over the world. To strengthen them further, the United Kingdom continues to support the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative. It is important we deliver on the commitments we made in the shared declaration and fully implement resolution 2436 (2018).

Accountability is also essential for the United Nations, for our peacekeepers and, indeed, for ourselves. It is a fundamental part of providing protection for civilians. The United Kingdom Government values the contribution of the International Criminal Court to the fight for justice and unity by holding perpetrators to account for the most serious crimes of international concern. We shall together shine the spotlight on individual responsibility and deter future atrocities.

Our work together at the United Nations over many decades has furnished us with the necessary tools to stem conflicts. Yet too often we still hesitate to use them, even when the need is great. Nowhere is that need greater than when we look at the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Myanmar.

Protecting civilians in Syria should be an urgent priority for all of us. The United Kingdom Government continues to urge all parties to the conflict to do just that and the forces to uphold international humanitarian law. More than half the pre-war population is now displaced, and it is unacceptable that the Al-Assad regime continues to prevent aid from reaching millions of people who need it. It is imperative that all parties engage constructively and provide unfettered access to humanitarian organizations. The humanitarian situation in the north-west remains particularly dire. It is therefore important that we, the Security Council, come

together behind resolution 2504 (2020), on cross-border aid, when it is renewed in July. It is also crucial that we act on the findings of the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry investigation into the appalling attacks in Idlib in 2019 and hold those responsible to account.

The protection of civilians is also of paramount importance in Yemen. The ongoing conflict has claimed more than 100,000 lives, and we must all continue to push the parties to the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law and protect human rights. With 80 per cent of the population reliant on humanitarian aid, it is crucial that parties comply with resolution 2451 (2018) and facilitate safe, rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian response. In the long term, the best way to protect Yemen's civilians is a comprehensive political solution to the conflict, and we therefore urge the parties to engage constructively with the peace process led by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Martin Griffiths.

In Myanmar, the recent escalation of the conflict between the military and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army has led to a spike in civilian casualties, further internal displacement and restrictions on humanitarian access. We urge an immediate cessation of hostilities in Rakhine and Chin states. Those who commit human rights violations, including against the Rohingya, must be held to account, and there must be unhindered humanitarian access to protect all communities from the effects of COVID-19.

With regard to COVID-19, its potentially catastrophic impacts mount on top of the challenges facing civilians living amid armed conflict. We must now redouble our efforts to protect them, including from those who would seek to use the pandemic to their advantage.

When opportunity to end conflict lies before us, let us reach for our tools, not our excuses. Let us get behind the Secretary-General's call for a global humanitarian ceasefire. Let all parties to armed conflict lay down their weapons at this time and use the space to shield their people from COVID-19. Let us work collectively to build towards peace. Diplomacy can make that a reality. Working together, we could make it a reality.

Annex 15**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Kelly Craft**

I thank Sven, the Secretary-General, Mr. Maurer and President Sirleaf for their informative presentations today. This annual briefing is especially timely in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

As the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians (S/2020/366) states, the pandemic has the potential to devastate conflict-affected countries and overwhelm already weak health-care systems. It will continue to exacerbate vulnerabilities for women and girls, refugees, displaced persons, and older persons, making conflict mediation more challenging.

The United States has already provided over \$1 billion in health and humanitarian aid to combat COVID-19. Our foreign assistance is saving lives and helping address economic devastation around the world. Consistent with the United States strategy on women and peace and security, we are working to ensure that our assistance includes local strategies to mitigate COVID-19's acute risks to women and girls, including conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.

The United States strongly believes that all parties to conflict must comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Promoting training and sensitization to these laws, consistent with the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, as applicable, will be critical. The United States has shared and built upon best practices, including bilaterally and during coalition operations. We encourage others to do the same.

Globally, attacks on civilians are all-too common. For instance, the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (S/2020/210) notes that anti-Government elements were responsible for the majority of civilian deaths. In Myanmar, the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar documented the security forces' long-standing practice of attacking civilians from ethnic and religious minority groups.

In Syria, the Al-Assad regime and its military allies, Russia and Iran, continue to put civilians at risk by using barrel bombs and improvised rocket-assisted munitions. These have killed countless children.

We applaud the efforts of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which is collecting and preserving evidence of crimes committed in the country, and the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry, which recently investigated perpetrators of attacks on civilian infrastructure. In line with resolution 2254 (2015), we call for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in Syrian political and peace processes.

Protecting civilians in armed conflict is a collective effort. We support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to enable health officials to address COVID-19, and for unhindered and safe access for human rights and humanitarian workers. It is critical that access be ensured for humanitarians, health-care personnel and supplies to all people in need in order to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Civil society, including journalists and human rights defenders, plays an important role in investigating violations and abuses. The Council must help to protect these individuals from reprisals. Member States must also address violations

and abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law through relevant national, regional and international legal mechanisms.

The United States supports the Secretary-General's call for national protection frameworks to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and promote monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Leveraging technology for more robust crisis-mapping and data analysis will be needed to establish early-warning systems.

Likewise, we support the Department of Peace Operations revised protection of civilians policy. Peacekeeping creates the space for political and peace processes to take shape, enabling host States to find durable solutions to armed conflict. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council has adapted the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet the difficult challenge of protecting civilians in the eastern part of the country. The new mandate enhances and clarifies the role of the Force Intervention Brigade, addressing the concerns of Congolese civilians who wanted a more immediate response to attacks by armed groups. The Security Council's willingness to adapt and refine mandates to meet needs on the ground helps to ensure that missions are fit-for-purpose.

To better protect civilians in conflict, the United States and 46 Member States have endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. We encourage all Member States to join us so that we can help peacekeepers effectively implement their protection of civilian mandates. While we know that COVID-19 has restricted movement and troop rotations, it is important that peace operations continue to fulfil their protection of civilian mandates while ensuring the safety, security and health of all United Nations personnel.

The United States believes that efforts to protect civilians and build peace cannot be achieved without the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. Peace is more durable when women are at the table for peace talks. Additionally, increasing women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping improves operational effectiveness and a mission's ability to fulfil protection of civilian mandates.

Today's video-teleconference is an opportunity to discuss how, collectively, we can better protect civilians in conflict. The Security Council cannot accept attacks on children, infrastructure and civilians as normal. Especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we are compelled to demonstrate the political will to promote implementation of protection frameworks and pursue accountability for violations of international law. The United States will continue to seek mechanisms to better protect civilians from barbaric acts — the acts that the United Nations was created to prevent.

Annex 16**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy**

I thank the Estonian presidency for convening this timely debate. I am also grateful for the statements by the Secretary-General and other briefers.

We note with serious concern the continued suffering of civilians in armed conflicts in 2019, when more than 20,000 civilians were killed or injured in 10 countries. Civilians continue to account for the vast majority of deaths and injuries in armed conflicts. Women and children remain targets of violence and abuse, accounting for 42 per cent of casualties and injured. Millions of people remain displaced, facing the increased risk of starvation and fatal contagion.

The protection of civilians in armed conflicts has been an arduous task for the international community and for the Security Council. Last year, the Security Council marked the twentieth anniversary of the addition of the protection of civilians on its agenda. It was highlighted that the Council's actions had undoubtedly saved civilians' lives, yet much more needed to be done. One year later, we are saddened to hear that the reality on the ground tells a vastly different story. It is high time we redouble our efforts and transform our political will and commitments to actions. In this regard, I would like to make the following observations.

We continue to stress the paramount importance of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. An ounce of prevention in this case may save hundreds or even thousands of lives. Addressing the root causes of conflicts and ensuring equity, justice and development are the best ways to prevent conflicts from occurring or recurring. We support the full and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Regional organizations should play a leading role in promoting preventive diplomacy and confidence-building measures. In that regard, we are proud to share that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has made a major contribution to turning Southeast Asia into a region of friendship and cooperation.

When an armed conflict breaks out, it is the primary responsibility of States to protect their own citizens. States should not start addressing this responsibility from scratch. We support enhancing national ownership of this issue, including through strengthening awareness among national entities regarding their obligations under international humanitarian law, and through building national capacity. United Nations peacekeeping operations, while abiding by the principles of peacekeeping, can assist in certain cases. It is essential that they be given clear protection of civilians mandates and have adequate resources and training to meet the mandate's expectations.

Enhancing and ensuring respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, by all parties to armed conflicts, especially the principles of distinction, necessity and proportionality, is crucial. We strongly condemn attacks against civilians and civilian objects. Those violations must be addressed appropriately at the national and international levels, in accordance with applicable laws and the Charter of the United Nations. It is extremely distressing to hear reports of attacks against health-care facilities and schools. Other infrastructure critical to the survival of civilians and communities should also be protected, such as that linked to water and food security. With increased urban warfare, extra care should be given to ensuring the well-being of innocent civilians in densely populated areas.

It is imperative that all civilians have access to assistance. We call on all parties to armed conflicts to ensure unhindered access of humanitarian agencies that operate in accordance with the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is exacerbating the vulnerability of civilians in conflict situations. Access to and supply of necessary assistance should take precedence. We reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's call for a global humanitarian ceasefire to allow for an adequate response to COVID-19. All parties should join forces to fight this common enemy, and make every effort to plan and implement concrete and meaningful steps to peace and recovery.

As a country whose people have first-hand experience of such suffering, we fully empathize with the plight of civilians in armed conflicts around the world. The protection of civilians will remain among the top priorities of Viet Nam during its membership of the Security Council and beyond.

Annex 17

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Adela Raz

Allow me to start by thanking the Estonian presidency for having convened today's Security Council open video-teleconference meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Let me also thank Secretary-General António Guterres; the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer; and Nobel Peace Laureate, member of The Elders and former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for their insightful briefings on this matter.

As a country affected by protracted conflict and imposed wars, Afghanistan is deeply aware of the devastating, long-lasting impacts that conflict has on civilians. For more than four decades, my country and people have endured the severe social, economic and psychological impacts of war. As a result, we have seen increases in poverty and instability, and millions of Afghans have been forced to migrate, becoming internally displaced, while countless others have lost their lives. Owing to the surges of violence perpetrated by the Taliban, the Afghan people are not safe at sports fields, hospitals, mosques, weddings and funeral ceremonies, or now, as a result on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, at home.

The Taliban, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and their affiliate terrorist groups continue their indiscriminate attacks on all segments of Afghan society, targeting civilians and even using them as shields. The last few months have seen a series of heinous and inhumane crimes that have further exemplified that disregard for innocent lives.

Just last week, in a mosque attack, 12 worshippers lost their lives while waiting to break their fast. Three weeks ago, terrorists linked to ISIL and the Taliban attacked a maternity ward at a hospital in Kabul, killing 24 people, including nurses, newborn babies and their mothers, while a further 24 people were killed in a suicide strike at a funeral in Nangahar, in eastern Afghanistan. On 25 March, another brutal terrorist attack took place on the Dharamshala Sikh Temple in Kabul, in which 25 people from our Sikh community lost their lives while a dozen others were injured. Those acts not only constitute war crimes and flagrant violations of international human rights law but also are deep and profound losses that have shattered families and communities. And they are only examples from a long list of acts perpetrated by these groups.

As reflected in the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366), in 2019 Afghanistan accounted for the largest number of recorded civilian casualties, having seen 10,392 civilians killed or injured, with women and children representing 42 percent of the victims. The most recent United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) quarterly report recorded 710 civilian casualties by anti-Government elements between January and March 2020, with 39 per cent of those being attributed to the Taliban alone. Following a brief period of reduction in violence, attacks by the Taliban increased after the signing of the peace agreement between the Taliban and the United States.

The situation has been further exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which requires immediate preventive, curative and humanitarian measures in conflict-affected areas to protect and safeguard vulnerable people. In line with the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire, the Government has been insistent in calling for a lasting ceasefire with the Taliban that could effectively create an environment that is both conducive to peace talks and that could allow us to effectively address the humanitarian situation created by the pandemic. On that

note, we hope that the recent three-day Eid al-Fitr ceasefire can lay the foundation for a more sustainable cease of hostilities.

The Government of Afghanistan is committed to the protection of civilians in conflict and to avoiding the ultimate collateral damage from operations and expects the same of our partners from the international coalition. In 2017, we adopted a national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation, and the Government continues to exhaust efforts to ensure that such incidents do not take place. Efforts have included strict rules of engagement in our armed forces and the establishment of the post of Deputy National Security Adviser to oversee civilian-protection issues.

Violence against humanitarian workers and the targeting of medical personnel in the face of COVID-19 are egregious acts that must be stopped. Of the 18 attacks that were recorded by UNAMA over the past few months, 17 were attributed to the Taliban. The group has ignored all calls from the Government to enter into a ceasefire to effectively address this pandemic, thwarting not only our ability to end the pandemic but putting further strain on our health-care systems and resources, which we must divert to addressing their repeated attacks. Most recently, on 22 March, the Taliban abducted a group of health workers and their driver as they were on their way to evaluate a health facility, releasing them two days later.

The Government of Afghanistan underlines the role of the Security Council in the resolution and prevention of conflicts and the protection of civilians through the implementation of recommendations of the Secretary-General and of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the matter, as well as the effective implementation of sanctions regimes. We welcome the three-day ceasefire agreed by the Taliban and the Government and will continue to implement confidence-building measures, such as our pledge to release 2,000 prisoners to finally bring peace to our country and ensure we can respond to the new challenges brought by the pandemic.

The people of Afghanistan are war-weary and eager for peace. My Government understands that now is not the time for continued conflict. Now more than ever, it is important that Afghans come together to address the various impacts of the pandemic so that we can create a peaceful, secure and stable future.

I would like to reiterate the commitment of my Government to ensuring the safety and security of our people, in line with our national and international obligations, and our strong belief that resolving conflicts remains the most effective way to ensure the protection of civilians. To that end, we remain committed to working towards reaching a long-lasting resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan and hope that the United Nations and our international partners will continue to support us in achieving an objective that is desperately longed for and deserved by the people of our country.

Annex 18**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Angola to the United Nations, Maria de Jesus dos Reis Ferreira**

I wish to thank and congratulate the Estonian presidency for having convened this debate on the critical issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366) and take good note of the recommendations therein, and we avail ourselves of this opportunity to reiterate Angola's commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions of international humanitarian law and the international human rights framework.

Angola is of the view that prevention is the most effective tool for addressing potential conflict situations; that States bear the primary responsibility for the protection of their civilian population; and that the international community has a subsidiary but very important role to play in addressing the very serious problem of threats against civilians.

As the world faces an unprecedented challenge in responding to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, those living in conflict-affected countries remain among the most vulnerable and at risk from the consequences of the disease. It is crucial that we discuss the impact as well as the repercussions on protection activities and humanitarian assistance of the public-health measures adopted subsequently to mitigate its propagation.

While the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the fundamental fractures and societal deficits in many countries and significant resources are being diverted to respond to the health crisis, containment strategies have amplified the existing vulnerabilities of civilian populations caught up in conflict and humanitarian crises, and they have created new protection challenges for humanitarian workers and peacekeepers, while conflict actors have continued to engage in violent attacks against civilians and vulnerable groups.

It is important that Governments and the international community, while absorbed by the health crisis, do not neglect protection activities and adjust their actions in the field in order to continue to fulfil critical functions, respond to emerging needs, support public-health efforts and discourage parties to conflict from pressing their advantage or seeking opportunities to perpetrate attacks or increase the violence and civilian suffering.

The world continues to experience prolonged conflicts that lead to economic and humanitarian crises and require urgent long-term solutions. Furthermore, terrorism, violent extremism and proxy wars waged by outside Powers continue to pose an existential threat to civilians. We cannot allow armed conflicts to derail our common development agenda. It is urgent to promote conflict prevention and conflict resolution centred on dialogue, with the true aim of silencing weapons and creating conditions favourable to development.

Unfortunately, despite the establishment of a robust normative framework by the Security Council, the United Nations and other international bodies, the protection of civilians and the strengthening of protection in peacekeeping missions have not been translated into significant improvements to the protection of civilians where conflicts are rampant.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilian points to widespread civilian deaths and injuries and estimates that more than 20,000 civilians were killed or injured in 2019 as a result of attacks in conflicts. With an

increase in the number of civilians killed or injured by improvised explosive devices, ground engagements, air strikes or other tactics, children, women, older people, people with disabilities and humanitarian personnel continue to account for the vast majority of recorded victims.

In that context, we remain particularly concerned about three critical issues: first, referring to humanitarian access, which remains a key challenge in many armed-conflict situations, with warring parties obstructing the delivery of assistance, as a tactic of war, putting additional strain on civilians; secondly, the brutalizing of civilians and the targeting of civilian infrastructure, in total disregard of international humanitarian law, and the lack of accountability enjoyed by most parties to armed conflict has become an endemic feature in ongoing conflicts, further aggravating the plight of civilian populations; and, thirdly, the fact that the widespread use of explosive devices is having a devastating humanitarian impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

In this regard, Angola joins the Secretary-General's call for the wide ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and for States to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.

This open debate is a clear sign that we are not doing enough to implement existing policy regarding the protection of civilians. As the Secretary-General correctly emphasizes in paragraph 50 of his report, the principal challenges regarding the effective protection of civilians remain respect for the law and accountability for serious violations, and our shared responsibility for preventing violations continues to be as essential as ever.

We call on the Council and all international actors to move beyond rhetoric, demand respect for international humanitarian law and lead international efforts to end impunity by holding perpetrators to account and to facilitate the taking of decisions and actions that respond to the present global reality and challenges.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, Mher Margaryan**

I would like to thank the Estonian presidency for having convened this Security Council open high-level video-teleconference on the theme of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The participation of the President of the Republic of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid; Secretary-General António Guterres; the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer; and Nobel Peace Laureate and member of The Elders Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in this video-teleconference demonstrates the persistent relevance of the topic, in particular in the light of the recent new challenges.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) and for the recommendations contained therein. The crisis caused by the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a severe impact on the protection of civilians in conflict situations. Armenia has extended its unequivocal support to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, which is a key prerequisite for facilitating efforts to address the pandemic in conflict contexts. The Secretary-General's appeal was also supported by the authorities of Nagorno Karabakh.

The report points out the devastating impact of conflicts on civilians, with tens of thousands of casualties, gender-based violence targeting women and girls, violations of the human rights of children and indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure. We share the Secretary-General's view as to the urgent need to facilitate rapid, unimpeded and safe humanitarian access to the conflict-affected population in order to prevent the suffering of civilians. Attempts to deny humanitarian access aimed at meeting the protection needs of people living in conflict areas should be identified and effectively addressed. International humanitarian law and international human rights law remain crucial frameworks for the effective protection of civilian populations. Armenia attaches the utmost importance to the full compliance by all parties to conflict with the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, without any political preconditions.

The promotion of the norms of international humanitarian law is an important element of Armenia's security-sector governance and reform. International humanitarian law is incorporated into the curriculums of Armenia's military educational institutions. The Government of Armenia prioritizes the safety of children and the protection of their right to education, in line with its commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration. The protection of women and girls affected by conflict is another important priority of the Government of Armenia, reflected also in the national action plan on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security.

Armenia appreciates the close involvement of the International Committee of the Red Cross in protecting schools through the construction of safe rooms and protection walls and the implementation of other programmes. Full and unimpeded access by the ICRC to conflict areas, including to places of detention, is vital to ensuring the protection of civilians.

The civilian population of Armenia's border regions and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) continue to face serious humanitarian risks, which may be further exacerbated owing to the spread of the pandemic and the suspension of the activities of conflict-related field operations. Strict adherence to the 1994 trilateral ceasefire agreement concluded by Nagorno Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia and the 1995

agreement on consolidation of the ceasefire regime is essential to ensuring the protection of civilians and preventing violations of international humanitarian law.

We strongly condemn Azerbaijan's continual attempts to escalate the situation along the line of contact between Artsakh and Azerbaijan and the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, including the targeting of civilians, border settlements and infrastructure, infiltration attempts and large-scale, unnotified military exercises of an offensive nature. At a time when the international community is consolidating its efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, such actions display total disregard for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire and the calls made by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group co-Chairs to refrain from any provocative action that could further raise tensions during this period.

For a long time, Armenia has been raising the need to address the manifestations of racial and ethnic profiling, the glorification of hate crimes and the denial and justification of past crimes, especially those led and incited by State leaders.

On 26 May, the European Court of Human Rights made its ruling on the case *Makuchyan and Minasyan v. Azerbaijan and Hungary* in relation to Azerbaijan's release and glorification of its officer, Ramil Safarov, who murdered Armenian officer Gurgen Margaryan when he was asleep by axing him to death while participating in a training course within the framework of the 2004 Partnership for Peace programme in Budapest. Here is an excerpt of that ruling:

"The court is particularly struck by the fact that, in addition to immediate release, upon his return to Azerbaijan R.S. was granted a number of benefits, such as salary arrears for the period spent in prison, a flat in Baku and a promotion in military rank awarded at a public ceremony."

The release of the convicted murderer by decree of the President of Azerbaijan and the glorification of Mr. Safarov is an affront to the standards of civilization and human dignity.

Today resolute action by the United Nations and regional organizations to advance prevention, including the prevention of hate speech and identity-based crimes, is more critical than ever to ensure the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

Argentina thanks Estonia for organizing this open debate in the Security Council and welcomes the briefings made by Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

In our view, it is critical that the Council continue to be committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict through the promotion of full respect for international law — particularly humanitarian, human rights and refugee law — and the fight against impunity.

As expressed by the Secretary-General in his most recent report (S/2020/366) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis has put the most vulnerable members of society at even greater risk. Argentina therefore reiterates its full support for the Secretary-General's call, on 23 March, for an immediate global ceasefire in order to help create the necessary conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance, facilitate diplomacy and bring hope to those most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, all parties to conflicts must make every effort to ensure effective and timely access to humanitarian assistance, including cargo and materials. Such assistance enjoys special protection under international humanitarian law. It is therefore of concern that in many situations access to humanitarian assistance is impeded or even denied.

Furthermore, we must collaborate and combine efforts to protect and promote the access of civilians, especially the most vulnerable, to all health services, including medical care and maternal and reproductive health services. This population is now more vulnerable than ever due to the pandemic, which is overburdening systems and facilities already devastated by conflict.

We must continue to include and promote the protection of civilians in the mandates of United Nations field missions, and ensure that such provisions are clearly developed and that said operations are effectively and efficiently resourced. At the same time, we note that all peacekeeping operations must comply with international humanitarian law.

Argentina echoes the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations in stressing the importance of ensuring that the protection of civilians during peacekeeping operations is carried out in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the guiding principles of peacekeeping operations. Similarly, any use of force in response to threats of physical violence against civilians must be in keeping with applicable legal obligations, the mandate established by the Council and each mission's specific rules of engagement and intervention.

We believe that non-military strategies to protect civilians in peacekeeping operations are very valuable political tools that can help to end violent conflicts while building trust among the parties in their search for peaceful solutions and in their efforts to advance the peace process.

Host Governments also bear the primary responsibility for protecting civilians. That is why it is essential to maintain close cooperation and open dialogue with national authorities.

The Argentine Republic supports the vision of prevention and early warning for civilian protection mandates, as promoted by the Secretary-General, as well as its connection with the second pillar — the responsibility to protect. That vision also enjoys the support of the Independent High-level Panel on Peace Operations.

We believe that it is necessary to elaborate a robust strategy for the prevention of atrocity crimes that includes an impartial analysis of the facts. Such a strategy must include the necessary financial resources and political support to ensure that the international community's response reaction is never again late or weak.

Our country is a member of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and, since the 2005 World Summit, has supported the progressive development on this issue and participated actively in the various areas in which it was discussed, particularly in the framework of the General Assembly.

We believe that the protection of civilians should be understood within the framework of a political and humanitarian perspective that focuses on creating a safe environment. That is why the protection of civilians in a peace mission requires the cooperation of its military, police and civilian components. States need to have a clear and common understanding of the characteristics, modalities and implications of the protection of civilians. That is especially important in cases where the use of force is necessary to protect civilians from physical violence, in accordance with each mission's mandate and rules of engagement.

In addition, we consider it essential to advance the mainstreaming of the women and peace and security agenda in peacekeeping operations.

As the Secretary-General's report indicates, the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence persists in many armed conflicts, especially among women and girls. Despite special measures to protect people from sexual exploitation and abuse, including more robust measures and victim-centred efforts within the Organization to ensure accountability amid allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel, many major challenges remain. These require constant vigilance to ensure that systems are in place to identify and mitigate risk, select and train personnel and deliver on a timely and robust victim-centred response when allegations are made.

It is worrisome that some counter-terrorism measures continue to adversely affect humanitarian activities. In that regard, we reiterate the call made in General Assembly resolution 72/284 for States to ensure, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law, that anti-terrorist legislation and measures do not impede humanitarian activities.

Under international humanitarian law and the resolutions of the Council, attacks of any kind against civilians, especially women and children, or other protected persons, schools, cultural property and places of worship, as well as child recruitment and the impeding of humanitarian access, are all violations of international law.

Argentina shares the international community's concern that armed conflict promotes the proliferation of organizations engaged in various forms of international crime, such as the smuggling of migrants and human and arms trafficking, all of which directly affect the civilian population.

In recognition of the fact that young people constitute a large part of civilians harmed by armed conflict and that disrupting the access of children and young people to education and economic opportunities has a decisive impact on the potential for lasting peace and reconciliation, Argentina once again urges those States that have not done so to adhere to the Safe Schools Declaration, which has already been endorsed by 105 countries. Together with Norway, Argentina led the intergovernmental process to draw up the Safe Schools Declaration, and we had the honour of hosting the second International Conference on Safe Schools in 2017 in Buenos Aires.

The Security Council must remain committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including through additional consideration of certain elements such as children, women, journalists or medical personnel, as well as to promoting respect for international law and ending impunity for serious violations committed against civilians. In that context, we stress the system's role with regard to children and armed conflict. Fulfilling that role requires adequate support. In addition, we support the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which aim to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Argentina reaffirms the preventive role of accountability mechanisms. Impartial mechanisms are essential for the investigation of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. In that regard, I would like to highlight the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, pursuant to Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions, as well as the central role played by the International Criminal Court. We note that, pursuant to the Rome Statute, the Court has jurisdiction over many attacks on civilians.

Argentina considers it a priority to continue the debate on the creation of new mechanisms to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law and to generate constructive, transparent and inclusive dialogue among States and other interested parties. We also agree with the Secretary-General on the need to reduce the implementation gap between the normative framework and realities on the ground.

With regard to the challenges new technologies pose for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as identified in the Secretary-General's report and in the concept note (S/2020/402, annex) for this open debate, Argentina stresses that international law, including human rights law and international humanitarian law, applies to cyberspace. The increase in cyberattacks on the health sector in the context of the pandemic has highlighted the potential human cost of cyberoperations, as well as their impact on the civilian population. As societies go digital, the need to protect critical infrastructure and maintain a safe, stable, open and peaceful cyberspace increases significantly. In that regard, Argentina supports all efforts being made to advance the implementation and consolidation of the framework for responsible State behaviour in cyberspace.

Argentina expresses its deep concern about the threat posed by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Such use results in death, injury and trauma to civilians, damage and destruction to essential infrastructure and critical services and unintentional displacement. In addition, it leaves behind explosive remnants of war, which pose a long-term threat to social coexistence and economic activity, as they potentially compromise the safety of inhabitants. Argentina welcomes the Secretary-General's approach to addressing that threat, as set out in his Agenda for Disarmament.

In December 2018, Argentina, along with more than 20 countries of the region, signed the Santiago Communiqué, which supports the process culminating in the negotiation and adoption of an international political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

With regard to the section of the Secretary-General's report on the effects of conflict and climate change on the environment, Argentina agrees that this issue must be addressed on a case-by-case basis when a specific threat to peace and security arises, in accordance with the Council's mandate under the Charter of the United Nations. However, we reiterate that we must not undermine the role of the Security Council by considering issues that exceed its mandate, nor, as a general rule, should environmental issues be linked to security issues.

In the light of the foregoing, it is up to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Water, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Regional Economic Commissions, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the specialized agencies to address environmental issues.

Likewise, Argentina would like to clarify that there is no consensus in the international community about the concept of water security. States must work towards food security and access to water for their populations.

In this unprecedented global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we stress the importance of compliance with the ceasefire and international humanitarian law and human rights law in order to ensure and support an effective response to the crisis and the protection of the most vulnerable.

Argentina joins with the Secretary-General's in his vision to reaffirm, today more than ever, how critical it is for the international community, including the Security Council, to launch a joint response in support of all States Members of the United Nations and affected communities.

Annex 21**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations**

Austria would like to thank Estonia for convening this open debate via video-teleconference on the protection of civilians.

My country fully aligns itself with the statements made by the observer of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. In our national capacity, we would like to highlight a few of our national priorities.

As we all know, the current coronavirus disease pandemic has been changing the lives of people around the world. Regrettably, it has also compounded the numerous challenges that civilians in armed conflict have been facing for a long time and threatens the livelihoods of already vulnerable people. That is why Austria did not hesitate to join the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. We call on all States Members of the United Nations and parties to conflicts to follow suit.

As in previous years, we thank the Secretary-General for his excellent report (S/2020/366). His assessment therein that the past year brought another 12 months of suffering unfortunately reflects the dire reality on the ground. Independent journalism is one way of exposing this human suffering. It can also serve as a means for promoting accountability and advocating solutions. We are therefore concerned about the decline in the number of journalists and media workers reporting from conflict zones as a result of the high degree of insecurity and the rising number of targeted attacks against them.

Austria would especially like to underline the report's call for new approaches to urban warfare. The fact that more than 90 per cent of the victims of the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas (EWIPA) are civilians is unacceptable. To this end, in October 2019, Austria organized an international conference to raise awareness of the humanitarian impact of the use of such weapons and to start drafting a political declaration on the subject. The participation of 133 States, international organizations and civil society showed that there is interest in this topic. We look forward to the adoption of the declaration and the elaboration of a toolbox of good practices, to be followed up by workshops, including workshops directed at the armed forces.

Another subject of great concern to Austria in this context is the fact that the rapid progress in artificial intelligence enables the development of autonomous weapons systems. Austria has developed the concept of human control as a central guideline, and in 2018 introduced a draft mandate for the start of negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention for a legally binding protocol that prohibits autonomous weapons systems, which are not subject to meaningful human control in critical functions.

Despite many strong statements issued last year on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the protection-of-civilians agenda (see S/PV.8534), we continue to face myriad difficulties concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Women and girls still must endure horrendous acts of sexual and gender-based violence, and they remain particularly vulnerable in various conflict settings. Civilians in armed conflict should not be considered mere victims; more important, their contribution in peacebuilding and humanitarian relief efforts should be acknowledged. In this regard, we condemn the numerous acts of violence and intimidation against women and youth peacebuilders, human rights defenders and humanitarian first responders in armed conflicts.

The twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) and the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2250 (2015), both occurring this year, can serve as a reminder and a chance to link the valuable work on women and peace and security and youth, peace and security more closely with the protection-of-civilians agenda. Furthermore, Austria welcomes the adoption, in 2019, of resolution 2475 (2019), on the situation of persons with disabilities in armed conflict. We encourage the Security Council to take the needs of persons with disabilities into account throughout its entire agenda.

Moreover, we cannot lose sight of the specific situation of minorities or their needs for protection and assistance. We have unfortunately witnessed throughout history that discrimination and prejudice against minorities lie at the root of many conflicts around the world. In his call to action on human rights at the opening of the Human Rights Council in March, the Secretary-General emphasized that a new agenda for human rights must also focus on the protection of minorities against any form of discrimination. In Austria's view, it is essential that the protection of the rights of minorities be adequately incorporated in the overall United Nations agenda for the prevention of conflicts.

As the protection of civilians has in recent years become an integral part of many United Nations peacekeeping missions, we need to make sure that peacekeepers are well prepared to fulfil their protection-of-civilians mandates, and we highlight the importance of disseminating international humanitarian law, particularly to the armed forces. In the light of this, Austria continues to offer United Nations-certified courses aimed at creating better awareness of the protection of civilians at the operational level. These courses include several topics pertinent to the women and peace and security agenda.

We repeat our call for full compliance with international humanitarian law. The strict and consistent implementation of the principles of international humanitarian law remains a necessity in all conflict settings. Austria continues to be a strong supporter of the intergovernmental discussions on strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law. We believe that accountability and the fight against impunity for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law are central to ensuring lasting peace.

We wish to highlight the important role that the International Criminal Court (ICC) plays in that regard. In December 2019, the Assembly of States Parties of the ICC adopted an amendment to article 8 of the Rome Statute concerning the crime of starvation of civilians in non-international armed conflict. We believe that this amendment strengthens the Rome Statute system and the protection it provides.

Finally, Austria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this open video-teleconference by submitting this written statement. However, we hope to see the Security Council return to its full functions as soon as circumstances permit, and we look forward to resuming the delivery of oral statements at the next open debate on the protection of civilians.

Annex 22**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, Yashar Aliyev**

At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of Estonia for convening this open high-level video-teleconference meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for sharing its concept paper on the topic (S/2020/402, annex I). We also thank the Secretary-General for submitting his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) and wish to express appreciation to the briefers for their briefings.

The issue we are discussing today is of the utmost importance for the Security Council, the entire international community in general and for my country in particular. Civilians continue to suffer from armed conflicts, whether they be new or protracted, active or suspended under ceasefire accords. During the reporting period, tens of thousands of civilians were killed or injured, millions of people were forced from their homes and direct or indiscriminate attacks damaged and destroyed homes, schools, hospitals, places of worship and other civilian infrastructure. Moreover, millions of displaced persons have been prevented from returning to their homes and are facing limited prospects for early solutions. Alarming numbers of people continue to remain missing in connection with armed conflicts.

As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the coronavirus-disease crisis has created incentives for some parties to conflict to press for an advantage. Their actions may envisage not only the recourse to force, but also attempts to use the current health crisis and appeals for an effective humanitarian response to the pandemic as a shield for consolidating military gains resulting from the use of force, ethnic cleansing and other serious violations of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Spurious peacefulness and commitment to truce and ceasefire are among the tools that aggressors frequently employ to freeze territorial seizures and promote and enhance their scorched-earth policies.

Accordingly, the most effective way to prevent the outbreak, escalation and continuation of armed conflict, and thereby to protect civilians, is to prioritize respect for international law in all circumstances and by all available means, and by ensuring the earliest resolution of conflicts and accountability for serious violations. In a similar vein, humanitarian relief actions, by definition, should be exclusively humanitarian in nature. They must be carried out in conformity with the guiding principles of the United Nations on humanitarian assistance, namely, the principles of neutrality, impartiality and the consent of the affected country, while fully respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

The forcible deportation of some 250,000 Azerbaijanis from their homes in Armenia at the end of the 1980s was accompanied by killings, enforced disappearances, the destruction of property and pillaging. At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, the full-scale war that was unleashed by Armenia against Azerbaijan claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and caused considerable destruction of civilian infrastructure, property and livelihoods in my country. A significant part of the territory of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno Karabakh region, the seven adjacent districts and some exclaves, was seized by Armenia and remains under its occupation, in violation of international law and resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993).

The occupied territories were ethnically cleansed of all Azerbaijanis, as a result of which more than 1 million people in these territories were forced to leave their homes and properties. Furthermore, Armenia has pursued the deliberate policy

of strengthening its military build-up in the seized territories and of changing their demographic, cultural and physical character, in clear violation of international law. These activities undermine the rights and freedoms of hundreds of thousands of people uprooted from their homes and pose an imminent threat to peace, security and stability in the region.

Furthermore, as of the beginning of 2020, 3,889 citizens of Azerbaijan were registered as missing as a result of the conflict, including 719 civilians. Among the civilians, 71 are children, 267 are women and 326 are elderly persons. It has been established that 871 of the 3,889 missing persons were either taken as prisoners of war or hostages, including 604 servicemen and 267 civilians, of whom 29 are children, 98 are women and 112 are elderly persons. Armenia is in breach of international law for refusing to account for the missing persons within its control, as well as for refusing to conduct a prompt and effective investigation into the fate of the missing persons and into the existing evidence that at least 871 of them were taken into its custody and have not been seen since.

The recently published comprehensive report on war crimes in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and on Armenia's responsibility (S/2020/90, annex) provides convincing evidence as to the range, variety and consistency of Armenia's commission of multiple war crimes, including those relating to civilian deaths and injuries; civilian property; the mistreatment of detainees and prisoners of war; the taking of hostages, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement leading to changing the character of the occupied territory; the destruction of cultural heritage; and damage to the natural environment. Some of the offences examined in the report amount to the crime of genocide, as ethnic Azerbaijanis have been targeted because of their nationality and/or ethnicity, and the relevant intent has in part been to destroy the group.

The facts contained in the report necessitate prompt action by the United Nations, its relevant organs and mechanisms, Member States, other relevant international organizations and the international community as a whole to ensure accountability, in accordance with the international law of State responsibility and with international criminal law. As the Secretary-General makes clear in his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, to prevent the recurrence of war crimes and provide justice to victims, allegations of war crimes require credible investigation and prosecution wherever and whenever they occur.

In conclusion, it is critically important that the Security Council consistently maintain its focus on the protection of civilians affected by armed conflicts and systematically reiterate its demand that parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Annex 23

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations, Jamal Fares Alrowaiei

[Original: Arabic]

First, I would like to thank the permanent delegation of Estonia, which holds the presidency of the Security Council in this month of May, for holding this important meeting. It comes at a time when conflicts and armed struggles are multiplying around the world and the international community is facing the challenges of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which particularly affects civilians in conflict-affected countries. We welcome the participation in this meeting of Her Excellency Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia.

I must also thank the briefers, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General; Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia and member of The Panel of the Wise.

The Secretary-General, in his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366), presents a picture of the human suffering of civilians, especially children, women, the elderly and people with disabilities, in conflicts around the world. They are compelled to migrate or are displaced and face food insecurity; in some countries, civilian facilities and populated areas come under attack. The COVID-19 outbreak has only added to the suffering of civilians caught up in armed conflicts and poses a direct threat to them, given the destruction of the health sector, the proliferation of crowded camps that provide an ideal environment for spreading the virus, and the various obstacles hindering access to humanitarian aid, especially now with the pandemic. Bearing that in mind, Bahrain supported the Secretary-General's sincere appeal for an immediate global ceasefire and the harnessing of international efforts to counter and eliminate COVID-19.

The possession by non-State armed groups and terrorist organizations of the very latest weaponry serves only to worsen and prolong conflicts, and results in heavy casualties among innocent civilians. Bahrain condemns terrorism, whatever form it may take, in particular when it is backed by States that fund, arm and equip terrorist groups and provide them with mercenaries and political and media coverage.

Modern technology has helped such groups to create platforms from which to spread their poisonous ideology, stoke violence, recruit followers and launch cyberattacks on official institutions. Member States must therefore make a concerted effort to tackle hate speech and share security information. In that regard, we must also take note of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

The protection of civilians is a key priority for Bahrain and its sovereign, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Bahrain is party to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and two of their Protocols Additional, which are the cornerstone of international humanitarian law. In 2004, it acceded to the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In 2018, it passed Decree Law No. 44 on international crimes, underlining the importance of combating the most egregious of international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression.

Prompted by the noble initiative of the Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, the United Nations, at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, declared 5 April as the annual International Day of

Conscience. The initiative arose from the belief of His Highness that the international community must shoulder its moral responsibility to put an end to the wars and conflicts afflicting the world today, which have had such tragic consequences for whole peoples plagued by poverty, hunger, disease, epidemics and displacement.

In conclusion, Bahrain affirms that the protection of civilians, in particular that of the most vulnerable groups, in armed conflict must remain a priority for the international community. We renew our support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, for which there is now a more pressing need than ever.

Annex 24

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Rabab Fatima

We thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open video-teleconference and for the opportunity to share our perspectives. We also thank the Secretary-General and the other briefers for highlighting some key issues on the protection of civilians from conflict situations around the world.

We welcome the report (S/2020/366) of the Secretary-General that came out earlier this month. We cannot agree more with the report's renewed emphasis on respecting international law and ensuring accountability. The report highlights, inter alia, continued casualties among civilians, the displacement of people and the destruction of civilian objects in various parts of Myanmar, including in Rakhine state, to which we would particularly like to draw the Council's attention.

In Bangladesh we value the notion of protecting civilians in armed conflict as a matter of principle. We have the haunting memory of the genocide committed against our people during our war of liberation in 1971. We are therefore inspired by the promise of "never again" anywhere in the world. As a demonstration of that unwavering commitment, we have been part of United Nations peacekeeping operations in some of the most difficult places in the world. We are aware of the growing and complex challenges related to the protection of civilians in operating environments. Nevertheless, our peacekeepers are committed to discharge the protection of civilians tasks mandated by the Council without any caveat.

During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, for example, our peacekeepers have taken up additional humanitarian responsibilities to support local efforts to contain the pandemic's spread. They are facilitating humanitarian assistance and medical care and raising awareness about health and hygiene. Where hopes and aspirations are on the brink, these courageous peacekeepers are leading by example and continuing to win the hearts and minds of the people they serve. They are also getting infected by the disease in the line of duty. It needs to be ensured that they receive the best possible medical care. We must factor in pandemic challenges in future planning and mandate-setting for peacekeeping missions. Additional capacities and adequate equipment will need to be built into mandates to ensure the safety requirement of peacekeepers in pandemics and health emergencies.

We reiterate that protection-of-civilians mandates in peacekeeping contexts need to be backed by certain enabling factors, such as viable strategies and adequate resources. Over the years, the norms, strategies and guidelines for protecting civilians in peacekeeping operations have matured significantly. The latest 2019 Department of Peace Operations policy is an important addition to that normative framework. Yet there remain gaps between policies and practices. Our troops have been tackling those challenges with professionalism and the necessary degree of creativity.

The Security Council has a responsibility to ensure that protection-of-civilians mandates are also supported by meaningful political processes to prevent conflicts and sustain peace. We therefore urge the Council to regularly review the mandates in close consultation with the host Governments, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Secretariat. On our part, we remain committed to further mainstreaming the protection of civilians in the predeployment training programmes designed for our troops and police. Furthermore, we are also championing the Action for Peacekeeping protection-of-civilians agenda along with other partners.

Today's debate is taking place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has aggravated manifold the situation in conflict-affected countries and

exacerbated further the vulnerability of marginalized populations. Keeping that in mind, we joined many other partners to strongly support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. In many parts of the world it has strengthened the ongoing peace processes and prevented relapses into violence. However, in many other places the call is being totally ignored.

Regrettably, in Myanmar the situation has worsened amid the pandemic. On 29 April, the outgoing Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Ms. Yanghee Lee, expressed serious concern over escalating violence in Rakhine and Chin states, stating that

“[w]hile the world is occupied with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Myanmar military continues to escalate its assault in Rakhine state, targeting the civilian population.”

The Myanmar authorities' actions are in total disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights law, to say the least. Even the International Court of Justice provisional measures of 23 January seem to have no positive impact on Myanmar's attitude and actions. Unfortunately, the suffering of those being persecuted remains unheeded by the international community. For the 1.1 million Rohingyas stranded in Bangladesh, those chilling developments further intensify their despair and hopelessness. Needless to mention, the incidents also severely undermine our efforts towards ensuring their safe, dignified and voluntary return to their own land and finding a durable solution to the crisis.

The lingering Rohingya crisis has once again revealed the various facets of the challenges in ensuring the protection of civilians when the State concerned is unwilling to do so. Also, being a part of most of the highly challenging United Nations peacekeeping missions, we have gained a wealth of experience in implementing the protection-of-civilians mandate first-hand on the ground. Guided by the lessons learned, we wish to take this opportunity to stress the following points.

First, States should take the primary responsibility for protecting civilians in their territories. Developing national policy frameworks, as rightly underlined by the Secretary-General, is critical in that regard. It is a long-term endeavour and an integral part of nation-building efforts. Prevention is at the heart of protection. States should therefore take steps to inculcate the values of peace, tolerance and harmony that contribute to long-term prevention and ensure peaceful coexistence among different religious and ethnic groups.

Second, the vulnerable situation of civilians in post-conflict societies needs special attention. For peace to be sustained, people affected by conflict must be rehabilitated and reintegrated into mainstream society more effectively. At the same time, States need to invest more in building a culture of peace by addressing the root causes of conflicts, eliminating hate speech and ensuring equal opportunities for growth and prosperity for all. In doing so, it is also important to integrate the opinion of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups in the decision-making process.

Third, for the effective protection of civilians in vulnerable settings, continued political support from the Security Council and commitment on the part of host Governments and the parties to the conflict are critical. In that regard, my delegation would like to re-emphasize the importance of the responsibility to prevent harm to civilians in armed conflict.

Fourth, protection-of-civilians mandates in peacekeeping settings need to be fully supported by viable strategies, capacities, adequate resources and coordinated efforts by all actors on the ground. The new developments and trends make that more imperative. The United Nations country team and peacekeeping missions

should further develop the capabilities for early warning signs, situational awareness and evidence-based reporting of facts and should work more closely with host Governments and other stakeholders to deter the possible escalation of violence.

Fifth, unhindered safe passage for relevant humanitarian personnel and supplies to civilians in need must be ensured by all parties to armed conflicts. Medical facilities, educational institutions, especially schools, and places of worship should be left out of harm's way during violence and conflicts.

Sixth, States should establish appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to fulfil their disarmament commitments, including those on conventional weapons, such as landmines and other explosive devices. Such lethal weapons with the capacity to kill indiscriminately and large-area effects must not be used against civilians. Those who commit such violations must be held accountable.

Seventh, the global norms for ending violence against women and children during armed conflict need to be translated into action. Bangladesh was associated with the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. We are now one of the front-runners in terms of our contribution of women peacekeepers. We believe that uniformed women personnel can play a pivotal role in protecting women from violence and supporting them in crisis. We are therefore championing the Action for Peacekeeping women and peace and security agenda. In the same vein, we also see merit in redoubling our efforts to promote the youth, peace and security agenda in order to advance protection-of-civilians mandates in vulnerable settings.

Last, ensuring accountability and justice for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law is crucial to enhance compliance and prevent a culture of impunity for the commission of atrocity crimes against civilians. The Security Council should make appropriate use of the tools at its disposal to that end, including through duly considered options for imposing sanctions and referrals to international criminal justice mechanisms.

Annex 25**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

I would like to thank Estonia for organizing this year's debate on the protection of civilians, as well as to extend our gratitude to the briefers for their presentations.

Brazil associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366) once again reminds us of the heavy toll of armed conflicts on civilians. Each year, the number of civilians reported killed or injured in hostilities surpasses 20,000, which, as the report itself recognizes, is almost certainly an underestimation. Beyond casualty figures, the report is about families left in mourning, children losing hope and people living in fear. The concept note (S/2020/402, annex I) for today's debate stresses that the question is not one of a lack of legal norms but, rather, one of compliance. I would like to take one step back to highlight that perhaps the greatest problem lies somewhere else — in the need for lasting peace. We may continue to strengthen the protection-of-civilians normative framework and enhance compliance, but it will be only a palliative measure if we do not address the root causes of each armed conflict.

When conflict erupts, compliance with international humanitarian law is key to protecting civilians. Unfortunately, indiscriminate attacks, the destruction of cultural heritage, the targeting of medical facilities and access restrictions for humanitarian workers have been the sad rule rather than the exception. Brazil strongly condemns any violation of international humanitarian law and calls on all parties to armed conflicts to respect their obligations under international law. Furthermore, when violations do occur, they must be investigated impartially, and perpetrators must be held accountable.

In his report, the Secretary-General identifies the following risks and opportunities for the protection of civilians in the new decade: urban warfare, developments in weapons technology and malicious use of digital technologies, the impact of armed conflict on the environment and climate change, and peacekeeping operations. While Brazil shares many of those concerns, we must give a word of caution against the impulse to discuss all of them in the Security Council, unless they are related to a specific situation or country. The well-crafted division of labour among United Nations organs is not a suggestion in the Charter of the United Nations but, rather, the most legitimate and efficient way to achieve the main objectives of the Organization.

More often than not, contemporary armed conflicts are carried out near or in urban areas, thus posing new challenges to the protection of civilians. International law already provides the normative framework to regulate military conduct in urban warfare, particularly through international humanitarian law. At the same time, the nature of the urban environment adds an extra layer of complexity in distinction and proportionality assessments. In those scenarios, the principles of humanity and precaution play an instrumental role. Brazil endorsed the Santiago Declaration, signed by Latin American and Caribbean States, in favour of a political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. For Brazil, such a political declaration should establish common standards, promote policies to reduce the risk of civilian harm and facilitate the exchange of good practices.

Some new technologies could be beneficial for protecting civilians, improving casualty monitoring and clarifying cases of missing persons. However, they might significantly change the nature of armed conflicts and the way they are

fought. Therefore, while international humanitarian law is fairly well equipped to answer many questions associated with new technologies, there is an urgent need for additional regulation on the matter, especially regarding lethal autonomous weapon systems.

The third issue raised in the Secretary-General's report is the impact of armed conflict on the environment and climate change. Armed conflicts have long-lasting impacts on all three pillars of sustainable development: they hinder socioeconomic development and affect the environment, generating considerable human suffering. Nevertheless, one should be cautious not to expand ad infinitum the already comprehensive protection-of-civilians agenda, particularly with issues that fall outside the mandate of the Security Council. While remaining sensitive to the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable countries, we must be wary of proposals to address non-military challenges through security lenses. Climate change and environment challenges are phenomena that lack military context and can have no possible military solution. They fall primarily under the development domain, and therefore require development-focused responses.

Finally, the report touches upon one of the most visible faces of the United Nations in its efforts to protect civilians, namely, peacekeeping operations. When protection-of-civilians mandates are authorized, they should be clear enough so that peacekeepers on the ground, especially commanders, understand precisely what is expected of them, without hampering the autonomy that leaders in the field require. It is also important to provide realistic mandates, with feasible tasks from the military, political and legal perspectives. We must also ensure that peacekeeping missions have both the capabilities and the resources they need, including appropriate tailored training, to fulfil their protection responsibilities as effectively as possible.

Brazil highlights the proven benefits that an increased presence of women in peacekeeping brings to areas including, but not limited to, the protection of civilians. We also underscore the essential role of gender advisers on the ground and the importance of promoting standards for their work within missions. Brazil is proud of the recognition achieved by our women peacekeepers for their work on the ground, especially in the fulfilment of protection-of-civilians mandates. Last year, Brazil was honoured when Frigate Captain Marcia Braga received the United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award for her work in the Central African Republic. It is immensely gratifying to learn that Brazilian Commander Carla Castro de Araujo, the current gender and protection adviser of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, will be sharing this year's award with Indian Major Suman Gawani, a military observer to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

This year's debate takes place amid a pandemic that has brought about additional risks to the lives and security of civilians in situations of armed conflict. It exacerbates their vulnerability and creates additional hurdles to humanitarian assistance in conflict zones. Brazil supports the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire in the light of the coronavirus disease. Ceasing hostilities is a major step to effectively protect civilians and minimize their suffering in these trying times.

Annex 26**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada,
François-Philippe Champagne**

[Original: English and French]

I thank Estonia for convening today's important open debate, and I am grateful to you, Madam President, for your efforts to make the Security Council more open and transparent during your country's presidency. Canada welcomes the report of Secretary-General António Guterres on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366). I could not agree more with the Secretary-General's appeal for political will to prioritize the protection of civilians and to ensure accountability. He has our full support.

In two days, the world will mark the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. They are the most visible manifestation of the collective commitment of the United Nations to protect civilians and pursue peace in times of conflict. Canada is particularly proud to support and empower women in peacekeeping, including through the innovative Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations. We wholeheartedly thank the civilian, military and police peacekeepers around the world for their service and great sacrifice.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is a global threat that does not recognize borders. The virus continues to claim lives and livelihoods all around the world. We know that civilians are already at disproportionate risk in times of conflict and humanitarian strife. These risks will only be exacerbated by COVID-19 and subsequent measures to respond to the pandemic.

This is why Canada has mobilized 59 countries to support the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. This call remains the right call, even if the Security Council has failed to support the appeal. This is why we are leveraging our role as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission to put the needs of fragile and conflict-affected countries facing COVID-19 at the top of the agenda. It is also why we have committed \$87 million in humanitarian assistance to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable people affected by COVID-19.

Our support to trusted partners that are responding to the global COVID-19 appeals will reach civilians around the world based on needs, including in countries such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, as well as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Upholding the rights and dignity of the most vulnerable civilians in these trying times is not an optional endeavour. This is because no one will be safe until everyone is safe. Building back better means ensuring that everyone is safe, everywhere.

There is no denying that COVID-19 has brought about new challenges, including for the protection of civilians. Yet we should not lose sight of the suffering experienced by civilians in conflicts that persisted long before this pandemic began, or of our shortcomings in addressing these challenges.

Parties to conflict continue to perpetrate unlawful, indiscriminate and targeted attacks against civilians, humanitarian and medical workers, hospitals and schools. Children suffer grave violations, including recruitment and use as child soldiers. Rape continues to be used as a weapon of war. Women and girls face sexual and gender-based violence.

Overtasked and underresourced United Nations peacekeepers struggle to protect civilians. These trends are painfully clear in the Secretary-General's report, and they must serve as a wake-up call.

The good news is that we have the tools at our disposal to address these egregious violations and chronic protection challenges. What we need is the political will. Canada will bring this political will to bear if elected to the Security Council for the period 2021-2022, just as we did when we first placed the protection of civilians in armed conflict on the Council's agenda back in 1999.

We will work tirelessly to uphold the rules-based international order and to advocate for scrupulous adherence to international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. We will push for the full and effective implementation of Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians, and we will build bridges across different agendas, such as those on children and armed conflict and on women and peace and security — two other issues that Canada is proud to have helped pioneer.

Answering the call of the Secretary-General's report, we will spare no effort in pursuing accountability for violations against civilians, including through mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court.

We believe that it is our collective responsibility to adapt and respond to new threats and challenges that cause or exacerbate conflict and imperil the lives and livelihoods of civilians. As warfare continues to evolve, and with threats such as climate change knocking at the Council's door, there is no time to wait.

One issue that Canada firmly believes must be explored further is the link between economic security, conflict and peace. This is particularly relevant in countries undergoing fragile or nascent transitions, where economic insecurity, including limited access to economic opportunity, risks reversing peace gains or exacerbating drivers of conflict.

If we are fortunate enough to be elected to the Security Council for the 2021-2022 term, Canada will call attention to the vital links between sustainable and inclusive economic growth, job creation, conflict prevention and peace and security, while fully considering the unique needs of civilians and ensuring our responses are gender- and conflict-sensitive.

Just as more than 20 years ago, we remain principled in our approach and unwavering in our advocacy to uphold and advance the protection of civilians agenda. We use our voice for good, and we do so in true partnership with others. This is the spirit and intent of our bid for a non-permanent seat on the Council, and what drives our multilateral engagement.

Annex 27**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations**

First and foremost, Chile would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Estonia for convening this timely debate in the context of the protection of civilians week. We also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for presenting to us the report on protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366).

The protection of civilians has been a duty bestowed upon us that deserves the utmost scrutiny and commitment in the way we approach it. To that end, we recognize its centrality on the agenda of the Security Council, as it is reflected in both the thematic and the country-specific Council discussions and decisions. Nevertheless, as the Secretary-General rightly points out, while the normative framework for the protection of civilians has been expanded, enforcement remains insufficient.

Challenges to ensuring the safety and security of civilians continue to become increasingly complex and interrelated. Civilians are vulnerable to intersecting factors for conflicts, such as the negative impacts of climate change, food insecurity and the adverse effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Despite international efforts to overcome these obstacles, the reality in the field keeps directing our attention towards women and girls, who are subject to appalling sexual and gender-based violence, civilian casualties by improvised explosive devices, ground engagements and air strikes, and the thousands of people who experience conflict-induced hunger caused by those who use starvation as a method of warfare. Just as troubling remains the situation of children in several areas, where tens of thousands of boys and girls no longer go to school but instead are forced to take part in hostilities, including on the front lines.

It is true that the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences are an aggravating factor for those challenges. However, it also presents an opportunity for us to step up to the challenge and, accordingly, move to strengthen the implementation of the international law framework, such as international humanitarian law and all relevant instruments, which shall be respected by all parties and actors in order to ensure effective protection for conflict-affected populations. Similarly, accountability measures should be enforced, while putting victims at the centre of all efforts, as the goal remains not only to protect, but to empower and support them, not as victims but as agents of their own stories.

Annex 28

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the United Nations

I wish to thank Estonia for organizing an open high-level video-teleconference meeting on this particularly important issue.

Cyprus fully subscribes to the statement of the European Union and would like to add the following remarks.

Over the past seven decades, international humanitarian law has established a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. As the Secretary-General mentions in his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366), despite the stated commitment, by a chorus of Member States, to international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians, the reality on the ground tells a vastly different story. As the report indicates, in the past year there were instances in which parties to conflict sought to respect international humanitarian law in their operations, but there were also countless situations to the contrary, where the rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law were regularly flouted.

Civilians bear no responsibility for a conflict, but they pay the highest price. They are the most vulnerable populations in the world and, on top of that, are even deliberately targeted. Death, injury, violence, including sexual violence and rape, forcible displacement as a direct consequence of war, disease, hunger, socioeconomic adversity and lifelong trauma make up a non-exhaustive list of the fate of civilians in armed conflict. The coronavirus disease crisis has only exacerbated their vulnerability and precarious situation.

It is widely understood that the main obstacles to better protecting civilians in armed conflicts primarily relate to the ways in which international humanitarian law is implemented, a general lack of respect for the rules by parties to conflicts, and a lack of accountability when these rules are ignored. As a victim of foreign aggression, Cyprus is all too familiar with the long-lasting effects and consequences of conflict on civilians — not only due to civilian fatalities and the physical, psychological and sexual violence suffered by its civilians during armed conflict, but also due to the egregious violations of their human rights and the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law, with the enforced disappearance of civilians and the refusal to reveal the fate and whereabouts of the missing, all with complete impunity.

My country would like to especially emphasize the humanitarian tragedy of missing persons, including civilians, who disappear during armed conflict after being seized by enemy troops, never to be seen again. Despite the strenuous efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the special commissions designed to uncover the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, many of them are never found and their loved ones are left searching for them for decades. Many ultimately perish, with no information as to what happened to them. All parties should ensure respect for international humanitarian law relating to missing persons and should take all measures to account for those reported missing and to uphold the right of their families and loved ones to be informed of their fate and whereabouts.

To this end, the Republic of Cyprus supports by all means possible the Committee on Missing Persons, set up in Cyprus in 1981, which has led to the identification of hundreds of missing persons, and stresses the importance of enhancing the Committee's work with regard to the many more hundreds of missing persons whose fate has remained unknown for so many years, including through obtaining full access to all relevant archival information by all parties, as well as

possible burial sites. As the Council has already called for this, most recently in resolution 2506 (2020), it should follow up with more robust demands.

We believe that the Security Council should be at the forefront of effectively ensuring better protection for civilians by insisting on compliance with international humanitarian law, addressing impunity, improving access for, and the safety of, humanitarian personnel and, of course, redoubling its efforts to prevent conflict and uphold the prohibition of the use of force. These principles should also permeate the Council's cooperation with other international and regional organizations, since they have a significant role to play in crisis management and operations not only for compliance with international humanitarian law principles, but also in establishing safe and secure environments, positive civil–military relations and humanitarian support, as well as the efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian aid, medicines, equipment and supplies.

With regard to impunity, I would like to reiterate that Cyprus is a staunch supporter of accountability, and to recall that the Council has the power to refer cases to the International Criminal Court, thereby closing a significant vacuum that existed prior to the Rome Statute.

Finally, the Republic of Cyprus, as a host country of a United Nations peacekeeping force since 1964, wishes to stress the importance of the protection of civilians as part of United Nations peacekeeping mandates, as outlined in the policy on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping, and follows the developments on this important aspect with great interest. As the primary responsibility to protect civilians always lies with the host countries, the Government of Cyprus is ready to cooperate with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, if necessary, within the framework of the latter's mandate, to support the Government's efforts and policies to protect civilians within the territory of Cyprus.

Annex 29**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations, Luis Gallegos Chiriboga**

[Original: Spanish]

I express my delegation's appreciation for the convening of this meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which is even timelier in this global context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This is one of the key issues that justify the existence of the Security Council and the United Nations: the protection of civilians and of their lives, their rights and their dignity.

I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, and the Nobel Peace Laureate and member of The Elders, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for their presentations this morning.

The year 2020 is the first year of the decade of action towards a world of peace in 2030. It is also the first year of the third decade since this topic was included on the Security Council's agenda in 1999.

Only last year, we celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, and yet we have achieved little as an international community in these past 12 months, despite a robust normative framework.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366), which I appreciate, describes an extremely fragile and tragic situation, as well as huge gaps and challenges, including that of COVID-19. In the current context of the global health crisis, all Members of the Organization and all its entities, including in particular the Security Council, must rise to this existential challenge. To that end, it is essential to ensure the implementation of a global ceasefire. In that connection, the Security Council must adopt a resolution that brings this body into line with international efforts to combat the pandemic. That is key to facilitating access and corridors for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We regret and condemn that women, children and internally displaced persons and refugees continue to be among the populations most affected. I also highlight in particular resolution 2475 (2019), which recognizes the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on persons with disabilities.

In the context of this issue, it is imperative that the Council consider the disproportionate impact of violence and conflict on women, and promote and ensure the participation of women in conflict-prevention and peacebuilding processes, including in efforts for the protection of civilians.

In just two months, it will be the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) and the origins of today's Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, chaired by Canada. My delegation wishes to express its interest in joining that Group to support its work in this area.

Ecuador rejects and condemns the continuing attacks against health-care infrastructure, including the destruction of hospitals, as well as the use of schools for military purposes and attacks against schools.

At the First Committee of the General Assembly in October 2019, Ecuador supported the statement delivered by the representative of Ireland on behalf of a group of countries on explosives in populated areas (see A/C.1/74/PV.15), and we take this opportunity to reiterate our condemnation of the use of such weapons as well as our commitment to continue supporting the efforts of the United Nations, the

International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society to promote the effective implementation of international humanitarian law and alleviate the impact and suffering caused by conflict .

Among immediate steps to effectively strengthen the protection of the civilians, Ecuador has been supporting the development of an international political declaration on this issue that aims not only to strengthen but to guarantee the protection of civilians. We therefore support, as priorities, political and practical commitments intended to prevent and stop the use of explosives in populated areas.

I also highlight here the commitment undertaken by Latin America and the Caribbean through the Santiago communiqué of December 2018 to protect civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

As a land of peace, Ecuador champions peaceful coexistence and the peaceful resolution of disputes, and rejects the use of weapons with indiscriminate effects prohibited by international humanitarian law. We are in favour of universal disarmament. We therefore also reject the use of lethal autonomous weapons. Autonomous weapons, in addition to lowering the threshold for triggering new conflicts, are incompatible with full compliance with international humanitarian law, which requires absolute human control.

Responsibility and accountability are key. That is why in January Ecuador joined the Franco-Mexican initiative proposing suspending the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities. In addition, in November 2018 we signed the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We urge all the countries to join these efforts.

I must not fail to mention the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. For any international framework for the protection of civilians to be comprehensive and adequate, it must encompass the total prohibition of nuclear weapons. The mere existence of these weapons threatens the existence of humankind. Not even the most sophisticated mechanism in the most developed country could contain or mitigate the devastating impact of nuclear weapons on the population; therefore, their existence undermines the protection of civilians.

Finally, I reiterate the full support of the Government of Ecuador for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire as the most effective way to protect civilians and as a first step towards lasting peace.

Annex 30

Statement by the Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the United Nations, Egriselda López

[Original: Spanish]

We thank the Estonian presidency for organizing this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. For El Salvador, this provides an invaluable opportunity to renew collective commitment on this issue, since it is civilians who still account for the vast majority of the victims of conflict and who suffer its effects in the short and long terms.

El Salvador takes this opportunity to reiterate its firm commitment to the implementation and application of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, the principal norms of international humanitarian law, resolution 1265 (1999) and other related resolutions, which together provide the international framework underpinning obligations to ensure the protection of, and respect for, human rights, especially of those not participating in, or who can no longer participate in, hostilities.

Based on our commitment to this international framework, my country has worked towards its application through the Interinstitutional Committee on International Humanitarian Law of El Salvador, whose main objective is to serve as an advisory body to the Government of the Republic on the measures to be taken for the effective adoption, application and dissemination of international humanitarian law.

Various ministries of the executive branch participate in this Committee, in the fields of foreign relations, justice and security, education, national defence and public health, together with the Office of the General Prosecutor of the Republic, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic, the Office of the Attorney for the Defence of Human Rights, and the Salvadoran Red Cross. To ensure effective functioning, the participation of these institutions is coordinated through a permanent secretariat and working subcommittees in the areas of legislation, awareness-raising and training in the matter, and protection of cultural heritage.

After more than 20 years' work, we can highlight its following main achievements: guiding the ratification of international instruments of international humanitarian law, most recently the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the consequent harmonization of national law with international requirements; awareness-raising and training on international humanitarian law, including for personnel of the armed forces, especially Salvadoran contingents to Security Council-mandated peace missions, other State institutions, and members of the academic community; developing the international humanitarian law handbook for the armed forces of El Salvador, containing information on the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, as well as other relevant instruments; and progress in implementing The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

Moreover, that Committee also assisted in establishing a national monitoring committee on resolution 1325 (2000), as well as in the creation and application of a national action plan for the period 2017-2021 for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions, the implementation of which brings together many State institutions, civil society and academia. Given the changing dynamics we face at present, this plan is currently undergoing a revision process so as to adapt it to respond more efficiently and effectively to national needs. Similar processes are under way with regard to children and young people, to ensure better implementation of resolution 2250 (2015) and subsequent resolutions.

Among the civilian population, vulnerable groups such as women, children and young people are the most affected. We therefore stress the importance of continuing to ensure the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. In this regard, we support in particular, given the specific needs of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, the adoption of resolution 2475 (2019), on special protection for persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict.

We reiterate the call to continue strengthening and incorporating special provisions and personnel into peace missions to ensure the protection of these groups — such as increasing the number of women in peace missions, since women have been shown to help strengthen relationships with local communities, helping build trust, which is an essential condition for protection. In this regard, El Salvador will continue working to see an increase in the number of women professionals in the peace missions where we have a presence, given their major contributions to meeting the objectives of achieving peace, security and international stability.

My country remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian damage caused during hostilities in populated areas. The protection status of civilians, despite all efforts to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, remains at risk. It is civilians who account for the majority of casualties in conflict situations; likewise for the effects of conflict — it is civilian children, women and men who continue to endure forced displacement, famine as a method of war, denial of access to humanitarian aid, and sexual and gender-based violence. At the same time, we continue to observe attacks on humanitarian personnel, medical facilities, civil infrastructure, property and the livelihoods of the civilian population. Against this backdrop, my country wishes to share the following considerations.

First, as the Secretary-General mentioned a year ago, while the normative framework for protection and guarantees of international humanitarian law have been strengthened, continuing violations reflect low compliance with those measures. That highlights the importance that protection instruments under international humanitarian law be binding in nature, and the Security Council has a key role to play to that end.

Secondly, given the continuing rise in reports with credible and documented evidence of violations, there is an urgent need to apply, whenever possible, more effective and robust approaches through national policies for the protection of civilians in all Member States of this Organization. These could establish civilian damage-mitigation teams, prepare risk and impact analysis of any such actions in populated areas and incorporate the principles of international law into all defence policies.

Thirdly, one of the areas of greatest deficit on this topic is accountability. In this regard, it is important to strengthen the capacities and resources of institutions involved in the administration of justice at the national and international levels alike, based on principles of impartiality and integrity, and this includes the International Criminal Court. Accountability must respond to the need to offer reparations to survivors of violations of international humanitarian law. We believe that linking local, national and regional accountability mechanisms with those with a broader international scope could provide significant advantages and show results more effectively and efficiently.

Fourthly, in our view it is important to adopt measures to protect civilians not only from physical harm but also from the irreversible psychological harm caused by abuses such as sexual violence or torture during detention, as well as for victims of forced disappearance and to provide assistance to their relatives.

Fifthly, peacekeeping operations are one of the main mechanisms for upholding international peace and security, carrying out their functions in hostile countries and

regions. We welcome the inclusion of approaches to protect civilians and vulnerable groups in the mandates set by the Security Council, and call for their continued inclusion in all current and future missions. We also believe that improving the protection of civilians in peace missions will require systematic evaluations of relevant regulations and system-wide accountability guarantees. In that regard, we welcome the recent review and launch of the United Nations policy on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations.

Sixthly, there is overwhelming evidence that the use of weapons can have a long-term impact on the recovery and development of communities affected. Therefore, it is essential to assess the links between the indiscriminate use of weapons and violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law. Without prejudice to the right to guarantee their national defence, States must refrain from exporting arms, ammunition, parts and components of conventional weapons to places where they are likely to be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law.

In other words, the implementation of international humanitarian law goes hand in hand with respect for, and the universalization of, international instruments on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, including the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects; the Arms Trade Treaty; the Ottawa Convention; the Convention on Cluster Munitions; the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and all its Protocols; and all instruments for the prohibition of weapons of mass destruction — the Treaties on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and the Conventions on Chemical and on Biological Weapons, among other international and regional instruments.

We would like to make special mention of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as this year marks 50 years since its entry into force and 25 since its indefinite extension. In this regard, we stress the need for the urgent application of concrete, transparent, verifiable and irreversible measures for nuclear disarmament, in order to comply with the obligations contained in the Treaty. The forthcoming review period is an opportunity to maintain and uphold the credibility, viability and effectiveness of the Treaty.

In the same vein, we welcome the priority given in the Secretary-General's new Agenda for Disarmament to the issue of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and we recognize the call for all States to support the development of measures to address the humanitarian impact in this area. We firmly believe that, with sufficient political will, this can be achieved through the development of common operating policies and standards, and the exchange of good practices. We hope that the Security Council will take the initiative of preparing a draft political declaration in these terms, thereby moving from words to concrete action.

El Salvador firmly believes that the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent conflict by investing in development, promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes, responding to the needs of post-conflict countries and regions and building stability by promoting a culture of peace and respect for international law.

The protection of civilians must be a priority of the work of the Organization and must override any geopolitical interest that is opposed to it. Genuine protection requires a commitment on the part of all Members of the United Nations to safeguarding the human dignity of all peoples without discrimination.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak represents the greatest challenge worldwide since the founding of the United Nations. The pandemic, which has reached all regions of the world, is also present in countries that are already in

crisis owing to conflict or natural disasters or that are affected by the consequences of climate change. We must not forget that those countries need support to strengthen their health-care systems, particularly in view of the large number of people who need emergency assistance.

In these difficult times, we call on those countries that, to the extent of their capacity, are able to support initiatives aimed at maintaining life-saving efforts to continue to do so. Furthermore, we commend the work of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, especially in ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance with equal access to all peoples, without any discrimination.

We would not want to miss this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Government of El Salvador, our gratitude for the support received through the Secretary-General's United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, launched by the Secretary-General and its donors. The resources granted to El Salvador will be invested in facing that health emergency, minimizing the social impact and supporting efforts towards an economic recovery.

Before concluding, we wish to thank the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement for the support that they provide to States to prevent the suffering of civilians in conflict situations and for the efforts made to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, as it has been doing in my country through the Inter-Institutional Committee on International Humanitarian Law in El Salvador.

We wish also to acknowledge the laudable work carried out by humanitarian workers, including medical personnel, in conflict zones. We condemn all attacks against them, which are unacceptable and may constitute war crimes; and, finally, we acknowledge the efforts of civil society to empower and give voice to those affected by armed violence.

Annex 31

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, Taye Atske-Selassie Amde

Let me at the outset express our sincere appreciation to the Estonian presidency for having organized this important high-level meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We thank Secretary-General António Guterres, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Ambassador Peter Maurer for their comprehensive briefings.

More than two decades after the Security Council formally adopted resolution 1265 (1999), taking up the protection of civilians as an important thematic issue, civilians continue to suffer disproportionately from the devastating consequences of armed conflict. The United Nations reported more than 20,000 civilian deaths or injuries in 2019 alone as a result of armed attacks.

Indeed, there has been some progress. The protection of civilians is now a key pillar of all peacekeeping operations mandates. The Council has also embraced the conceptual evolution of the protection-of-civilians mandates, taking concrete actions relating to the situation of religious minorities, missing persons and persons with disabilities in armed conflict, as well as the protection of civilians from hunger. There have also been efforts to advance the protection agenda through the development of policy tools and guidance at the United Nations and by Member States. However, those conceptual commitments are yet to be sufficiently translated into consistent implementation on the ground.

The implementation of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative is serving as a vehicle to improve mandate delivery, including the protection of civilians. However, the following areas continue to require greater attention and more robust commitments.

First, conflict-affected civilians, particularly women and children, continue to bear significant direct and indirect consequences. Their livelihoods, places of worship, schools, hospitals and civilian infrastructure continue to be targeted. Conflict-driven hunger is on the rise. These already vulnerable populations also have to cope with the dire consequences of climate change, including low productivity of subsistence farms, droughts, flooding and other natural disasters.

Secondly, non-State armed groups are increasingly employing explosive devices to inflict incalculable suffering on populated areas, resulting in at least 17,904 civilian casualties in 2019. Terrorists such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram continue to recruit and forcibly abduct children to use in asymmetric warfare.

Thirdly, sexual crimes and gender-based violence against women and girls are being deployed as instruments of war. Taken together, these changing dynamics of contemporary conflicts pose diverse and complex protection challenges for all peacekeeping operations.

Unfortunately, these protection challenges have been further complicated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. As countries turn inward to save lives and mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, armed groups are eyeing an opportunity to expand their reach and influence. The pandemic has also impacted the capability of States, including by weakening trust in institutions that are providing service to the general public. Digital technologies are being weaponized to spread misinformation, sow discord and incite violence.

Despite the overwhelming support from States Members of the United Nations, the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire received mixed responses. In that regard, it is regrettable that the members of the Security Council are not able to reach

consensus on sending the right signal. Furthermore, multilateral institutions and the rules-based international order are under increasing pressure.

To keep pace with these changes, peacekeeping must continually evolve and adapt to the changing global situation as well as to conflict and security dynamics. That means that we must be willing and ready to go beyond rhetorical commitments. The Security Council, the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries must work together in line with our shared commitments under the Action for Peacekeeping initiative to reinforce efforts towards a better protection of civilians and, most importantly, to ensure the full implementation of that solemn objective. That entails making sure that peacekeeping missions are properly resourced and sufficiently equipped to fulfil their mandates, including by removing caveats.

Ethiopia attaches great importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As a major troop-contributing country to United Nations peace operations and African Union-led peace support operations, Ethiopia places great emphasis on deploying troops who have been adequately trained, vetted, equipped and instructed. We are also committed to the full implementation of our obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.

As one of the signatories to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, a set of pledges covering the whole gamut of peacekeeping — assessment and planning, force generation, training and equipping personnel, performance and accountability — we have incorporated the protection of civilians into the training modules for all contingents. All our peacekeeping activities are also being evaluated in accordance with the principles of the protection of civilians and the Kigali Principles. We have established a continuous feedback loop and use the experience from the field to proactively improve training modules. We are also taking concrete steps to increase the participation and leadership role of women peacekeepers.

We believe that the protection of civilians, while important, cannot substitute for the primacy of politics to prevent the outbreak, escalation and recurrence of armed conflict. Building sustainable peace requires, first and foremost, addressing the root causes of conflicts such as poverty, socioeconomic marginalization and the exclusion of women, youth and minorities.

I also wish to highlight that, as one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, Ethiopia continues to provide international protection to hundreds of thousands of refugees who have been forcibly displaced by grave violations resulting from armed conflicts. Our revised refugee policy, which grants refugees more rights and the opportunity to be better integrated into society, has been hailed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa and a model for other refugee-hosting countries.

Let me conclude by reiterating Ethiopia's support for efforts to silence the guns in Africa and our firm commitment to fully implementing existing protection standards and strengthening compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law.

Annex 32

Statement by the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict remains of utmost concern for the EU and its member States, and we welcome the opportunity today to speak on this important topic. We also welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366).

The recent outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has not only created a global health crisis but has also had a severe impact on the protection of civilians. The direct and indirect effects of the pandemic are felt most strongly by populations already affected by humanitarian crises and conflict, including refugees and internally displaced persons as well as women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities and other persons in vulnerable situations.

It is also a human rights crisis. A joint response that puts people at its centre, under the leadership of the United Nations, and that addresses the needs and the protection of the most vulnerable is the only way to address the magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis. The EU is committed to combining all efforts to tackle the pandemic's impact on those most vulnerable across the world through both targeted and direct local support as well as by ensuring the continued provision of life-saving health and essential services, including sexual and reproductive health-care services and responses to violence, inter alia, sexual and gender-based violence.

The EU recalls that parties to armed conflicts bear the primary obligation to respect international humanitarian law and to meet the needs of populations under their control. They also bear the primary responsibility for human rights violations and abuses. It is vital that all parties to armed conflicts, State and non-State alike, respect their obligation under international humanitarian law to allow and facilitate the free passage of humanitarian relief. Unimpeded, fast and safe access to the people affected is the critical enabler to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian aid and the unhampered flow of life-saving medicines, equipment and supplies. It is important that these be free of any taxes and levies and not subject to bureaucratic restrictions. It is also essential that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures not impede the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance in violation of international law and that they be in accordance with international humanitarian law, including through the introduction of humanitarian exceptions, as appropriate.

While measures to contain the virus and mitigate its effects are taken, we must all ensure that adherence to international law prevails. The EU underlines the need for security forces to comply with international human rights law and the principle of non-discrimination and to exercise restraint when enforcing Government guidance as well as the importance of preventing harm to civilians.

Looking at the broader context presented in the report, the EU is gravely concerned by the ever-growing number of deliberate violations of international humanitarian law and the continued high prevalence of civilian deaths and injury, as well as the destruction or damage caused to civilian objects such as schools and health infrastructure, including maternities, and religious sites. We are also concerned by the growing number of attacks on humanitarian personnel as well as those on

medical personnel and facilities, including the recent attacks in Libya, Myanmar, Afghanistan and South Sudan. Such attacks are to be resolutely condemned. These also have a devastating impact on the safety and health of civilians and strongly undermine the fight against the global pandemic.

The EU is fully committed to supporting collective efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians, by taking all appropriate measures to ensure respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights; by taking all appropriate measures to address the protection needs of those most vulnerable; and by supporting the fight against impunity for serious violations.

The EU and its member States urge universal respect for international humanitarian law. We call on all parties to conflict to respond to the appeal by the Secretary-General and to ensure that an immediate global ceasefire in the light of the pandemic is observed.

Moving from the rhetoric of demanding respect for the law to its actual implementation and respect therefor requires constant engagement and concrete actions. At the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the EU and its member States specifically pledged to strengthen the implementation and dissemination of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Among other things, the EU will continue its efforts to strengthen the protection of humanitarian workers and health care facilities from attacks and to promote the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016).

Work is also being conducted with the armed forces to better institutionalize the protection of civilians in conflict by advocating the introduction of a protection-of-civilians component in training courses and exercises through the capacity-building of the military, the mobilization of local communities and civil-society-led tailored advocacy. The EU equally recognizes that the provision of trainings on international humanitarian law, including to non-State armed groups, is key to ensuring compliance with the law and should be pursued. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we reiterate the importance of protecting children during armed conflicts, taking all the appropriate and necessary actions to reduce the impact of armed conflicts on their lives. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective is, in this context, of particular importance to sensitizing all actors on the differentiated impacts, specific needs and situation of women and girls in conflict situations.

We strongly condemn the attacks against schools and universities, including the burning of facilities, the destruction of school equipment and the threats of attacks to which teachers and students are exposed. As such, we urge Member States and non-State actors to respect international humanitarian law and to facilitate access to education in armed conflict. In that respect, we also promote the protection of schools and education accessible to all in situations of conflict, supporting initiatives to roll out the Paris Principles and related commitments, and we take positive note of the efforts to promote and protect the right to education, including the efforts of Member States that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration.

The EU underlines that the protection of civilians must be at the core of peacekeeping mandates. Taking a three-tiered approach to protection is key in that regard, as outlined in the Department of Peace Operations Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping. We also recall the adoption, five years ago, of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians as an important tool for strengthening the effective implementation of protection mandates in peacekeeping.

Peacekeeping, crisis management and political missions can also play a key role in the protection of civilians, in general, and the most vulnerable segments of

the population, in particular, through their engagement with national authorities, security and military forces and capacity-building activities. We welcome that the reprioritization of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative commits us to launch and roll out a revised handbook on the protection of civilians and a new one on conflict-related sexual violence within the next six months to mission personnel in order to enhance mandate implementation.

International humanitarian law and the protection of civilians are included in the planning and conduct of all civilian and military EU crisis-management missions and operations that promote peace and security in the context of the EU's common security and defence policy. In particular, the EU promotes increased systematization of international humanitarian law training within the armed forces, with an emphasis on the concept of training the trainers, and welcomes initiatives aimed at identifying concrete ways to strengthen international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians, especially by reinforcing linkages and coordination between civilian and military components.

The EU is committed to addressing the root causes of climate change and environmental degradation through an ambitious global climate change mitigation and environmental protection policy, enshrined in the recent European Green Deal. Protecting the environment and safeguarding access to clean drinking water and sanitation can also help protect civilians, especially in humanitarian crisis and conflict settings, where people in particularly vulnerable communities tend to be most dependent on natural resources for food and livelihoods.

The EU will continue to prioritize the protection of civilians in its humanitarian missions. We are committed to better addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, including women and children and those at increased risk due to disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, religion or belief.

The EU is concerned that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be employed as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture and repression in various crises. The victims — women and girls, men and boys — often belong to the most vulnerable groups. The EU continues to support projects aimed at preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence and remains committed to the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies initiative. In addition, we also reaffirm the importance of comprehensive and timely sexual and reproductive health-care services.

The EU is equally committed to better addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in armed conflicts and to promoting their empowerment and meaningful participation in decision-making processes in all phases of humanitarian action. The EU welcomes the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, adopted last year, and fully supports their implementation.

Armed conflict leads to forced displacement, internally and across borders, thus forcing people to ask for international protection and asylum. The EU is committed to supporting the assistance and protection of persons displaced by conflict, but also to assisting local host communities and their already scarce resources to help meet the challenges arising from protracted displacement. The EU closely follows and supports the work of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and actively advocates for the protection of the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. We also support durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation efforts of IDPs to their homelands through a humanitarian-development nexus approach and in accordance with international law, notably international refugee law.

We recall that international law, in particular international humanitarian law and international human rights law, fully applies to the use of all weapon systems and that those who employ them remain responsible and accountable for their use. Ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law is particularly crucial as armed conflicts are increasingly being fought in urban areas, exposing civilians and civilian infrastructure to substantial risks. We recognize the challenges associated with the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas and their impact on civilians. We call on all parties to armed conflicts to fully comply with the principles and rules of international humanitarian law. Promoting compliance with international humanitarian law and respect for humanitarian principles remains a top priority for the EU and its member States.

We also reiterate our grave concern about the increasing harm and humanitarian consequences worldwide of attacks with improvised explosive devices, as well as their indiscriminate use and disproportionate effects in the perpetration of terrorist acts, in particular.

The EU also remains gravely concerned about the situation in Syria, which is causing unacceptable suffering for civilian populations. The EU strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force, as concluded by the recent report of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The use of chemical weapons by anyone — be it a State or a non-State actor — anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances is a violation of international law.

We condemn the unlawful alleged continuing use of incendiary weapons against civilians or military targets within a concentration of civilians in Syria. We call on all States not yet party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to join Protocol III, which prohibits the use of air-delivered incendiary weapons in concentrations of civilians, and we urge all States to fully comply with its provisions.

In that context, we also urge the Security Council to renew the cross-border mandate in July so that life-saving assistance can reach populations in need throughout Syria.

The fast pace of technological developments provides many opportunities but also entails risks. With regard to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS), the EU emphasizes that human beings must control their use and must remain accountable for decisions over life and death in order to ensure compliance with international law, particularly international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We encourage the Group of Governmental Experts on emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems to make progress in clarifying, reviewing and developing aspects of the normative and operational framework on LAWS.

The fight against impunity for the most serious crimes of international concern is one of the shared values of the EU. The EU strongly supports international justice and accountability mechanisms. We promote the work and independence of the International Criminal Court as an important actor in the global fight against impunity, and urge all States Members of the United Nations to do the same, including by ratifying the Rome Statute.

The extensive recommendations on accountability contained in the Secretary-General's reports on the protection of civilians remain very relevant today. Their implementation is our collective responsibility. Let us not shy away from our commitments.

Annex 33

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Fiji to the United Nations

I thank the President of the Security Council for this opportunity to address the Council on this important topic of protection of civilians in armed conflict.

In 2003, the General Assembly designated 7 April as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda. On this day, we the international community remember and pay our deepest respect to the victims. This day also serves to remind us that the United Nations and the Security Council must act with unanimity, determination and speed if such tragedies are to be avoided in future.

The Secretary-General's 2019 report (S/2020/366) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict shows that civilians continue to suffer the most from armed conflict. The report highlights that "more than 20,000 civilians had been killed or injured in 2019 as a result of attacks in conflicts in 10 countries" (S/2020/366, *para.* 7). The trend lines highlighted in the report are tragic and alarming.

On 23 March, the Secretary-General called for an immediate global ceasefire. He did so because he understood the scale of the impending crisis. If armed groups were to stop fighting, authorities in some of the most challenging environments might be able to focus their resources and efforts to responding to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has led to far-reaching challenges for authorities with regard to protecting civilians in regions affected by armed conflicts.

Fiji supports the Secretary-General's call to silence the guns. A substantial part of the responsibility for making that happen falls on the Security Council. The Council is underpinned by an architecture of international frameworks and has the political legitimacy to bring ceasefires into effect. The Charter of the United Nations and its Member States have placed that huge responsibility solely on the Council and nowhere else.

As a proud troop contributor to United Nations peace operations for more than 40 years, Fiji would like to respond to one specific area where the Council has requested guidance. How can peacekeepers be better prepared for deployment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Fiji welcomes the Secretary-General's Action for Peace initiative, which aims to strengthen the role of peacekeepers in protecting civilians in armed conflict. Fiji also welcomes the efforts of the United Nations and the Department of Peace Operations to protect peace missions and host countries from the COVID-19 pandemic and to prevent its spread. Fiji notes that the outbreak of the virus within peace operations is still small, even if it is broader in the communities in which they operate. Allow me to make three proposals.

First, COVID-19 preparedness should become a core part of training for peace operations — not only to protect peacekeepers, but also to allow them to operate in contexts where the virus has spread significantly.

Secondly, the budgets of peace operations should properly reflect the additional resources and equipment they need to fulfil their mandates in the context of COVID-19.

Thirdly, the predeployment expertise and experience of forces should be considered when deciding the composition of any new deployments. Several forces already have extensive hands-on expertise in managing and responding to COVID-19 in their national settings.

The COVID-19 pandemic, like climate change, has transformed peace operations. In climate catastrophes, civilian lives are lost when armed groups weaponize food and water. In the COVID-19 pandemic, access to health care and essential medicines is being increasingly weaponized by armed groups.

Both phenomena are rapidly transforming conflicts. Protecting civilians and reducing civilian deaths and casualties requires expanded skill sets, repurposed capabilities and new ways to structure peace operations.

Fiji reminds the Council of the Rwandan genocide, which we have commemorated on 7 April every year since 2003. It is a reminder of the need for timely interventions, the need to deter and prevent. This year, 7 April occurred during the peak of the pandemic in our host city. I take a moment to remember the thousands of deaths in this great city, New York, in the most powerful country in the world. I now ask the Council to imagine, by comparison, the scale of challenges faced by authorities in conflict-affected areas in order to protect their civilians from COVID-19.

As Fiji pays tribute to all peacekeepers and to all those involved in protecting civilians in armed conflicts around the world, we urge the Council to find consensus, harness goodwill and act with the utmost urgency to protect civilians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Annex 34**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations, Kaha Immadze**

At the outset, let me express my sincere gratitude to the Estonian presidency for convening today's open high-level debate via video-teleconference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to thank the briefers for their comprehensive and insightful speeches.

My country aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would also like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

Armed conflicts continue to have a deleterious impact on the civilian population worldwide. That troubling trend is thoroughly reflected in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/366). While we welcome the report and embrace its recommendations, we remain disturbed by the hardships that have been systematically borne by civilians during armed conflicts, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, denial of humanitarian access, and forced displacement.

It is particularly worrisome that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further compounded existing challenges in the protection of civilians. With the whole world entangled in an unprecedented health crisis, instead of caring for war-affected communities, one of the permanent members of the Council has seized new opportunities to advance its strategic interests in conflict situations, thereby inflicting further suffering on ordinary citizens.

The blueprint for reducing civilian suffering, however, rests on the simple notion of respecting international humanitarian and human rights law and ensuring accountability for grave violations in that regard. Therefore, it is up to us, the United Nations, to break the vicious cycle of disregarding international law, which claims thousands of civilian lives, or to continue in the same vein.

In that connection, Georgia spares no effort to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law at the national and international levels. That is why the four 1949 Geneva Conventions are part of Georgian legislation. Georgia's Inter-Agency Commission of International Humanitarian Law, a standing governmental body, leads efforts and coordinates the work of relevant entities aimed at ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. One of the key areas of the Inter-Agency Commission is the promotion of international humanitarian law through different types of outreach and educational activities, including in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In close cooperation with the ICRC, the Georgian military personnel's educational training programmes incorporate the key aspects of strengthening the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Furthermore, we are particularly thankful to the ICRC for providing assistance to Georgia in locating the whereabouts of missing persons, as well as in identifying and handing over their human remains to their families.

When it comes to the question of accountability, Georgia is committed to fully cooperating with the International Criminal Court on investigation into crimes committed during Russia's full-scale military aggression in 2008, which represents the Court's first case regarding Europe's legal geography. However, the occupying Power's lack of cooperation and refusal to allow access to the occupied regions promotes impunity.

Georgia's commitment to strengthening the universal application of international humanitarian law also includes an endorsement of global initiatives,

such as the Safe Schools Declaration, which is a key instrument for taking concrete action to achieve safe schools for all; the French-led political declaration on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflict; and, most recently, *Bringing international humanitarian law home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law*, adopted at the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Yet in spite of the Government of Georgia's efforts to strengthen the protection-of-civilians framework globally as well as nationally, we are continuously prevented from extending protection to the population residing in the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia — Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia. The protracted occupation of these two regions by the Russian Federation leaves ethnic Georgians continually deprived of such basic human rights as the freedom of movement, freedom to own property, the right to health and the right to education in their native language. To make matters worse, ethnically based human rights violations, such as killings, abductions, torture and inhumane treatment, have become an everyday reality for thousands of ethnic Georgians living in the Russian-occupied regions, as well as in areas adjacent to the occupation line.

Moreover, even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian occupation forces have, against the norms and principles of international law and contrary to the call of the Secretary General for an immediate global ceasefire in the world's conflict zones, been continuing to install barbed-wire fences and so-called border signs, while digging so-called anti-fire trenches along the Russian occupation line in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia. The Russian occupation forces have been continuing the closure of the so-called crossing points, which has blocked and impeded humanitarian access to the conflict-affected people living in the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia, thereby further aggravating the humanitarian and human rights situation on the ground. Only last week, the so-called process of borderization was simultaneously taking place in as many as 13 villages in the vicinity of the Russia-occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia.

It is alarming that, owing to the irresponsible and inhumane closing of the so-called crossing points along the Russian occupation line, thereby preventing humanitarian access to the Russia-occupied regions of Georgia, the dire humanitarian situation on the ground has been worsened and the death toll of innocent people living in the conflict-affected areas of the country continues to rise. Just a few days ago, on 20 May, yet another ethnic Georgian resident of the Russian-occupied region of Tskhinvali/South Ossetia, Mr. Jumber Miladze, died owing to the Russian occupation regime's disallowance of his medical evacuation until the most critical moment, bringing to 14 the death toll of ethnic Georgians since the closure of the occupation line in September last year. The severe security, human rights and humanitarian situation on the ground is particularly alarming, given that the Russian Federation allows no international monitoring mechanisms entry into the two occupied regions of Georgia.

Against this background, it is imperative that the Russian Federation, as the occupying Power that exercises effective control over the two occupied regions of Georgia — Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia — end the humanitarian crisis by allowing immediate and unconditional access of health and humanitarian services to these Russian-occupied territories, which as a result of the spread of COVID-19 are in extraordinary need of assistance. Important first steps towards meeting the basic protection needs of civilians living in the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia would include urging the Russian Federation to immediately cease its provocations against Georgia and respect its international obligations, first and foremost, by starting

the implementation of the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement and withdrawing its occupation forces from Georgia's territory. This only can be achieved with the joint supportive efforts of the international community.

Unfortunately, as has already been mentioned, cases of dire humanitarian crisis are happening in many parts of the world today, not just in Georgia, and civilians are being affected on a daily basis by armed conflict, exposed to conditions in which grave human rights violations are being committed and living in constant fear of aggression and the resumption of hostilities. As has been stated numerous times, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic makes the terrible plight of conflict-affected civilians even worse. We all know that the world will not be able to avoid humanitarian emergencies in future if we cannot tackle the basic humanitarian needs of conflict-affected areas in the world today.

Therefore, and in conclusion, I would like to reiterate my call on the international community to join together to urge all parties that are involved in armed conflicts or are exercising effective control in conflict areas to ensure complete, immediate and unconditional removal of any impediments to humanitarian workers' access and delivery of assistance to civilians living in conflict-affected areas. For its part, my country once again welcomes the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and states that it stands ready to contribute to efforts aimed at mobilizing international community support for strengthening the protection of civilian populations in armed conflicts.

Annex 35**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations**

Guatemala would like to express its gratitude to the Estonian delegation for convening, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of May, today's open high-level Security Council video-teleconference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We welcome the participation of Her Excellency Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, in this meeting and thank her for her statement.

As shown in the annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366), the world is living at a juncture characterized by a threat to peace in which tens of thousands of innocent civilians continue to suffer the horrifying short- and long-term consequences of armed conflict. Accordingly, Guatemala emphasizes the importance of preventing conflict and addressing its root causes, including by strengthening the rule of law, good governance and the respect for and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. These are the most pertinent means with which to protect civilians.

As a country contributing troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Guatemala takes this opportunity to recall that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests on the host countries that receive the support of the international community through United Nations peacekeeping operations. In this regard, it is crucial to continue strengthening cooperation between United Nations peacekeeping operations, where mandated, and the national authorities to support their respective efforts, taking into account the importance of national ownership as a key principle. Guatemala reiterates that the protection-of-civilians mandate in United Nations peacekeeping operations should be implemented as a whole-of-mission objective. This requires all relevant stakeholders, including civilian, police and military components, working in coordination with national authorities, to adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach.

Considering that armed conflicts are being waged in urban centres using weapon systems originally designed for open battlefields, my delegation calls upon all States to fulfil their commitment to the application of international humanitarian law in armed conflicts. Experience has shown us that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) causes serious damage to civilians and civilian objects and has an overall impact on services essential for civilians' survival. The use of EWIPA is an urgent matter that compels the international community to adopt measures towards the adoption of a framework for the protection and safety of people who suffer the consequences of the use of weapons in that context. The use of such weapons in this context causes death, injury and trauma, damages and destroys essential infrastructure and critical services, drives involuntary displacement, leaves in place explosive remnants of war that pose a long-term threat, disrupts social coexistence and economic activities, and affects overall human security.

Furthermore, Guatemala reiterates its firm support for protecting medical facilities and workers and for preventing attacks on education, including violence against students, educational facilities and personnel. Attacks and threats of attack can cause severe and long-lasting harm to individuals and societies. We stress that education can help to protect children and youth from death, injury and exploitation, alleviate the psychological impact of armed conflict by offering a sense of normalcy and stability, and provide links to other vital services.

From Guatemala's perspective and as a follow-up to the 2020 session of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, protection-of-civilians mandates

must be seen as the responsibility of all in-mission stakeholders, which is contingent upon several critical factors, including well-defined, realistic and achievable objectives; political will, leadership, performance and accountability at all levels, from troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs) to civilians and the Secretariat; adequate resources, mobility assets and well-trained, prepared and appropriately equipped military, police and civilian personnel; the capacity to assess threats to civilians; and policy, planning and operational guidelines and training.

Guatemala takes this opportunity to reiterate its position that caveats have a negative impact on the implementation of mandates and operational effectiveness and increase risks to the successful implementation of protect-of-civilians mandates on the ground. We stress the importance of avoiding all caveats that might have a negative impact on the protection-of-civilians mandate. In this regard, the Secretariat and TCCs/PCCs must strive to redouble all efforts aimed at identifying and clearly communicating any caveats that may have a negative impact on protection-of-civilians mandates. At the same time, in Guatemala's view, it is key that strategic communications be developed, in coordination with national authorities and other relevant stakeholders, on a mission's protection-of-civilians mandate and related operational capabilities and resources, with the aim of gathering relevant data from the ground and disseminating accurate information so that the expectations and concerns of local populations may be managed in a timely manner.

It has been 20 years since the Security Council adopted its first protection-of-civilians mandate, and experience has shown that United Nations peacekeeping operations have a relevant role play on the issue. However, today, peacekeepers are being asked to do more with less. While this is a reality we need to face, it is also a reality that we need to change. Peacekeepers put their lives at risk in the most dangerous circumstances for the noble goal of achieving peace. Guatemala has a long-standing tradition of contributing to peace and security through its participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Today, Guatemala renews its commitment to providing our best-trained and most equipped special forces, with the objective of fulfilling its mandate to protect civilians and their lives, without caveats.

Recalling the aforementioned annual report of the Secretary-General, Guatemala wishes to underline the emerging risks with respect to the protection of civilians. The threats caused by the malicious use of digital technologies and the implications of developments in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems must not be overlooked and should continue to be discussed in multilateral forums.

Finally, Guatemala reiterates that the best way to protect civilians from armed conflict is through prevention. Currently, we are tackling the global health emergency presented by the coronavirus-disease pandemic, and the efforts aimed at mitigating and controlling this disease should not be undermined by conflict. For this reason, we encourage all relevant parties in conflict to respond to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in order to focus all efforts on the protection of humankind as a whole from this deadly disease.

Annex 36

Statement by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations

We thank Estonia, President of the Security Council, for organizing today's open video-teleconference meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. We thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on the topic (S/2020/366).

Every human endeavour has the potential of resulting in conflict. While it is well understood that protecting civilians is a multidimensional and cross-cutting issue, an attempt to view and interpret every conflict situation as requiring United Nations protection is not just misleading but could have unintended consequences. The presumption that every conflict situation requires a United Nations intervention is not only too ambitious but could encroach upon the sovereignty of national Governments, which have the primary responsibility for protecting civilians.

Last year was the twentieth anniversary of the protection of civilians becoming a thematic item on the Security Council's agenda. Despite the Council being seized of the issue, we are conscious that the harrowing effects of conflicts continue to worsen the lives of civilians. However, the remedy should not be worse than the problem.

At the outset, it is important for us to have clarity on what the term "armed conflicts" means. In the recent past, we have seen not just Member States, but even United Nations entities themselves, take considerable liberty with what mandate "armed conflicts" entails. Even conflicts that are not armed conflicts are now being brought within the ambit of special representatives and other regimes, which is not only an interference in the sovereign space of countries but should remain the primary responsibility of national Governments. Bringing almost all conflicts within this ambit will essentially ensure that we lose focus on the real problem of the armed conflicts in which civilians must be protected.

It is in situations of armed conflict that the implementation of well-established norms, such as respecting international humanitarian law and other relevant human rights law by all parties to armed conflicts and ensuring safe and unhindered access for medical and humanitarian agencies to assist people in need, inter alia, are not matching expectations. The application of the concept of protecting civilians in armed conflicts is directly mandated by the Security Council to United Nations peacekeeping missions. Protection of civilians in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations has been a complex one for a number of reasons: the varying nature of armed conflicts, the concept's contradiction with some long-standing agreed principles of United Nations peacekeeping, limitations on the mandates and the serious inadequacy of the resources made available for peacekeeping missions.

As far as India is concerned, even before the protection of civilians was a part of the peacekeeping mandate, India was in the forefront of protecting civilians. We would recall the example of Captain Gurbachan Singh Salaria, who led an Indian infantry brigade group as part of the United Nations Operation in the Congo, in November 1961. This mission's objectives were to restore the peace and unity of the Congo and to protect the lives of the civilian population in Elizabethville. As a result, the greatest number of Indian casualties in a United Nations operation was lost; indeed, 39 personnel laid down their lives. Again, after all these years, we should not be putting our peacekeepers and those who protect civilians in armed conflicts directly in harm's way simply because the mandates that we give them are fuzzy or insufficiently defined so that those men and women at the forefront are not empowered to take protective operational action. The growing instances of serious attacks on peacekeepers and the high level of casualties suffered by peacekeepers

in different missions point to the difficulties in implementing robust mandates in situations involving rival warring groups mixed with civilian populations.

The expectation that United Nations peacekeepers can effectively ensure the protection of civilians in the absence of clear and prioritized mandates is not realistic. The protection of civilians is one of several other mandated components that peacekeeping missions are individually expected to fulfil. However, peacekeepers are often expected to do more than what they are mandated to do by the missions, and with limited resources. Without proper equipment and resources and clear accountability at all levels, the ability of peacekeeping operations to protect civilians is unrealistic. The Security Council should undertake a serious examination of mandates every time a peacekeeping operation is renewed.

The commitments under Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) provide a foundation to tackle some of the challenges and further strengthen the protective role of peacekeepers. We note that strengthening protection remains one of the key priorities in the recently issued document “A4P in the time of COVID-19” for the period May to October 2020. A collective endeavour is required, including by Member States and the Secretariat, to adapt to changing environments.

We also believe that increasing women’s participation in peacekeeping improves operational effectiveness and a mission’s potential to implement protection of civilian mandates. In that context, we support efforts to reduce barriers to women’s participation and promote greater participation through incentivization.

Going forward, it would be useful to consider evolving a normative architecture for protection of civilians in armed conflict as part of a broad endeavour. A framework that is politically attuned, but not politicized, and clearly defined and that strengthens capacities of national Governments, enhances community engagement, protects those who need it and abides by the do-no-harm principle with a strong gender lens can be a workable solution.

Annex 37**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations**

Ireland aligns itself with the statements of the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians.

Twenty-one years ago, the Security Council adopted the protection of civilians agenda. Since then, the Council has developed a culture of protection that recognizes the interconnected nature of the protection risks to civilians in armed conflict. The challenges that we grapple with now as a result of this global health crisis serve to highlight our interdependence and demonstrate that it is only through collective action, through collective commitment, that we can truly protect our citizens.

Secretary-General Guterres' appeal for an immediate and global ceasefire in response to the pandemic provides us with an opportunity that we must seize. It is encouraging that many parties to armed conflict have endorsed that call. We must continue to encourage others to do so, as we support those who have responded to the Secretary-General's appeal to move beyond the rhetoric. As we utilize any pause in conflict to support a response to coronavirus disease (COVID-19), we need to look at how that pause can be made permanent. We must use this as an opportunity to strengthen our approach to the protection of civilians, which can be done through a number of ways.

First, protection of civilians strategies will stand the greatest chance of success if they include the voices of those who are most affected by conflict. As the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2020/366) highlights, various groups, such as women, children, people with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons, are uniquely affected by armed conflict. Response strategies that are designed in concert with local stakeholders and civil society groups will ultimately reflect better the unique protection needs of those groups.

Secondly, as the world health crisis continues, we must ensure compliance and respect for international humanitarian law and continue to strengthen accountability for all violations. The Security Council can play an important role to ensure the effective investigation of credible allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law. In addition, increased cooperation and coordination between the Security Council and the International Criminal Court would significantly contribute to the international community's response where violations of international humanitarian law may amount to crimes within that Court's jurisdiction. Ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and preventing such crimes is more important than ever as Governments and health-care systems commit their attention and resources to deal with COVID-19.

Thirdly, Ireland welcomes the priority attached to the issue of explosive weapons in populated areas by the Secretary-General in his Agenda for Disarmament. The use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas constitutes a serious threat for civilian populations, both in the short and long term. As the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported in advance of last year's International Conference, "[w]arfare in populated areas using explosive weapons that have a wide impact area exacts a terrible toll on civilians".

The United Nations, ICRC and civil society have provided compelling evidence of the humanitarian consequences of explosive weapons on civilians in different conflicts around the world. Beyond the immediate deaths and injuries, the destruction of housing, schools, hospitals, water and sanitation systems and other critical infrastructure means that the civilian population is severely affected over the longer term. That devastation, in turn, can act as a catalyst for the displacement of

people within and across borders, rendering displaced persons and refugees further vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Ireland believes more can be done to reverse that pattern of humanitarian harm and to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law. To that end, we are proud to be chairing international efforts in Geneva to agree a political declaration to address the humanitarian consequences that can arise from the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. Through an open and transparent consultation process initiated in November 2019, Ireland is seeking to agree a political declaration in the coming months designed to foster behavioural change, enhance compliance with international humanitarian law and strengthen the protection of civilians during armed conflict. The widespread and cross-regional level of engagement in that process is a reflection of the desire of the international community to address that challenge.

The Secretary-General's report on protection of civilians also illustrates how the dynamics of armed conflict continue to evolve, with new and emerging threats to civilians. Through our peacekeeping experience, Ireland is very much aware of that and welcomes the ongoing efforts to adapt peacekeeping at all levels to meet those challenges. As the Action for Peacekeeping priorities evolve during the current crisis, there must be a continued focus on ensuring that peacekeeping mandates, especially the protection of civilians mandate, meet the realities of conflict on the ground.

As an aspiring Security Council member, this is a responsibility that Ireland fully understands. As COVID-19 creates new challenges for peacekeepers in accessing and vulnerable populations and protecting them from conflict, it is imperative that peacekeepers are fully supported and fully resourced in the implementation of that mandate. We must be watchful for public health measures that impede them in their work or that increase the vulnerability of already vulnerable populations.

Ireland encourages the United Nations and other Member States to continue to support efforts to increase the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping at all levels. Women are at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, taking on a disproportionate role as health-care staff, essential workers and carers in the home. We know too, however, that COVID-19 is diverting resources away from women's services while driving an increase in violence against women. The presence and skillsets of women peacekeepers, as well as women protection officers within missions, have an important impact on a mission's ability to carry out the protection of civilians and conflict-related sexual violence mandates. We need to ensure that women are there, participating equally and meaningfully in the delivery of peace.

Ensuring that peacekeepers fully understand the protection of civilians mandate is crucial. Ireland welcomes the updated protection of civilians policy and the commitment to roll out the handbook to missions, which it is hoped, will enhance implementation. Just as crucial is the provision of contextualized pre-deployment training. Training is integral to our United Nations commitments, and Ireland has been pleased to be able to deliver protection of civilians training to other troop-contributing countries.

Ireland will continue to seek innovative ways to share its expertise and experience of peacekeeping in this new, challenging environment. To that end, Ireland is collaborating with the Auschwitz Institute to provide online training on prevention of atrocities and is also supporting the Gaming for Peace project (www.gap-project.eu) to provide a free online training tool that will train peacekeepers in essential skills that will allow them to deliver their mandate of protecting civilians, such as cultural awareness, gender awareness and communications.

The complexity and protracted nature of conflict drives the complexity of the challenges of protecting civilians. The current COVID-19 crisis exacerbates those challenges, but, just as we are bound together by those challenges, so should we unite in presenting and delivering solutions.

Annex 38**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, Danny Danon**

In his comprehensive report (S/2020/366), the Secretary-General highlights the great challenges in protecting civilians in urban warfare. He also reminds us of the grim reality that urban warfare will continue to be a defining feature of armed conflict in the years to come. However, while the Secretary-General's report discusses the threats that stem from urban warfare, it does not discuss the reason for the shift to that new battlefield. It could be understood from the report that urban warfare is the unfortunate and unwanted consequence of modern armed conflict, but that is not always the case.

For terrorist organizations and regimes, urban warfare is not a blip but, rather, a feature of a carefully designed strategy to advance their deadly ideologies. They choose to operate in urban areas, they choose to put civilians at risk because it serves their interests in a number of ways. Hiding in homes, building bunkers in hospitals and establishing command centres in schools provides them an additional layer of protection — innocent civilians. In using human shields, terrorist organizations know that countries that abide by a moral code will think twice, even three times, before engaging their forces and putting civilians at risk.

Those terrorist organizations know that even when all precautions are taken and measures of proportionality are expended, sometimes civilians are still harmed. Yet, they do not see that as tragedy but, rather, as an opportunity. They cynically use the death of civilians, for which they are responsible, as propaganda against the forces that exercised every measure of restraint possible to minimize harm to civilians. They work to delegitimize the efforts of countries by painting them as the evil enemy in order to gain support at home and around the world. All of that is in addition to their purposeful targeting of innocent civilians.

Unfortunately, Israel has witnessed such tactics in action many times, both against itself and against many of the members of the Council and the international community. Terrorist organizations and regimes disregard international law. They do not value human life, they do not care about their own civilians and they definitely do not care about our civilians.

As the report describes, the methods of the terrorist regimes and organizations recklessly put the most vulnerable in harm's way. The Houthis in Yemen use tens of thousands of children as child soldiers. Hamas has built ammunition bunkers in the basement of schools in Gaza run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. The same children that are put in risk in those schools are then sent to risk their lives with Hamas operatives rioting on the fence with Israel. Hamas also uses hospitals in Gaza for their military operations, putting health-care workers, as well as the sick and vulnerable, at risk. Hizbullah in Lebanon digs terror tunnels from private homes across the border and into civilian populated areas in Israel.

Unsurprisingly, Hamas, Hizbullah and the Houthis are all supported by the tentacles of terror of the same regime. In fact, the Iranian regime is involved in nearly half of the 10 conflicts that the report blames for injuring and taking the lives of over 20,000 civilians in the past year. Since the outbreak of conflict in Syria, the Iranian regime has spent at least 30 billion dollars to support Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, who has not only targeted civilians but has done so with illegal chemical weapons. The Iranian regime transfers \$700 million to Hizbullah and \$100 million to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad annually. All are recognized terrorist organizations that put civilians at risk as they turn their neighbourhoods into urban battlefields. The Iranian regime uses its citizens' money to train and arm

terrorist organizations around the world. It teaches them how to use urban, highly populated areas to maximize the risk to civilians and then how to cynically profit from their death. The regime trains them to use civilians as dispensable pawns.

Israel has been dealing with terrorist organizations for decades. Our unfortunate familiarity with urban warfare has forced us to develop new combat doctrines and methods that take into account the complexity of an urban battlefield and allow us to achieve results while minimizing harm to civilians. Israel is a leader on that front and has shared its expertise with many countries now facing the same struggle. Israel looks forward to cooperating with many more countries and sharing its knowledge and capabilities in order to protect civilians in every conflict around the world.

Adjusting the way that we fight to fit the new urban battlefield is not enough. As I said earlier, urban warfare is not the result of modern armed conflict but a key feature designed by terrorist organizations and those who fund them. Therefore, if we wish to rid ourselves of the dangers that urban warfare presents, we must destroy it at the source. We must fight the ideology that preaches that to harm civilians, both your own and those of your adversary, is desirable. We must stop the funding that allows such an ideology to spread around the world and pays for the training enabling it to come to fruition. We must not allow the Iranian regime to continue down the dangerous road on which it is set.

The Iranian regime is the world's largest sponsor of terror. Any money that the regime gets its hands on is not used to better the lives of its citizens but, rather, is used to the detriment of civilians in the region and around the world. That has been made even clearer during the coronavirus disease crisis, where the regime continues to neglect its citizens as it pursues its military and terrorist objectives. Not only do sanctions on Iran hamper the regime's dangerous nuclear ambitions, it prevents them from spreading the terror and instability that put millions of civilians at risk.

The Secretary-General's report also touches upon the important issue of missing persons. An alarming number of persons continued to go missing in armed conflicts last year, and the families of the missing were left in despair, not knowing the fate and whereabouts of loved ones. In 2014, Hamas killed and kidnapped Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin. Hamas is also holding Avera Mangistu and Hisham Al-Sayed, two young Israeli civilians who suffer from mental illness. Hamas has refused to provide any sign of life to the families of the men and does not permit visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross. More needs to be done by the Council to ensure the return of Oron, Hadar, Avera and Hisham and all other missing persons.

As the Secretary-General's report rightly states, urban warfare threatens to take the lives of many more civilians. It is not enough to learn new doctrines of urban warfare; we must stop it from spreading in the first place. The Iranian regime poses a threat to civilians all around the world. It aspires to turn every civilian into a civilian in conflict. We cannot let that happen. The Iranian regime must be stopped.

Annex 39**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations**

I would like to thank the Estonian presidency for organizing this annual open debate. Italy aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

This debate comes at a really challenging time for the protection of civilians. Several conflicts are currently raging throughout the world, and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law have been widespread in the past year. As pointed out by the Secretary-General in this year's report (S/2020/366), civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts, including as a consequence of targeted attacks, and are disproportionately affected by gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated the suffering of people living in conflict settings. The most vulnerable, who account for many of the civilians adversely affected by armed conflict, are also more exposed to the effects of the pandemic.

It is therefore crucial to ensure unimpeded, fast and safe access to people in need in order to provide them with adequate medical assistance and ensure the effective delivery of humanitarian aid. In this perspective, Italy supports the call of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, which invited the conflict parties to lay down their weapons and comply with their obligations deriving from the international humanitarian law. We commend the launch of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan by the Secretary-General, which will contribute to addressing the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic for, and its impact on, the most vulnerable people in countries affected by humanitarian crises.

Italy is very concerned by the ever-growing number of deliberate breaches of international humanitarian law, resulting in attacks against humanitarian and medical personnel and facilities, which are especially heinous in the context of the pandemic, the arbitrary denial of humanitarian access, attacks against schools, the use of starvation as a method of war, genocide and sexual and gender-based violence. We strongly condemn the fact that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be widely employed as a tactic of war. It is imperative to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, in all circumstances, in international and non-international armed conflicts, as contemporary warfare poses new significant challenges.

Parties to armed conflicts continue to bear the primary obligation to respect the right of civilians and to meet their needs, guaranteeing that the principles established by the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional are fully respected. In this regard, the national implementation of international humanitarian law remains key. Italy commends the first resolution adopted by the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, "Bringing IHL home", and will continue to work with determination, also in collaboration with the International Red Cross Committee, to disseminate knowledge of international humanitarian law and to promote respect for such law, which today remains as relevant as ever.

The most effective way to ensure the full implementation of the protection of civilians agenda is to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflicts, thereby avoiding the occurrence of human rights violations and atrocity crimes. We believe that conflict prevention and the peaceful settlement of disputes must be a political priority of each Member State and of the United Nations, and we have always underlined the need to focus more on mediation and peacebuilding.

At the same time, when political dialogue does not pay off and conflict occurs, it is crucial to ensure the protection of civilians on the ground. Peacekeeping operations can play a key role in this regard, in particular when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable segments of the population, through their engagement with national authorities, security and military forces and capacity-building activities. We should enhance our efforts to strengthen the impact of peacekeeping operations on the protection of civilians, fulfilling the commitments we took in the framework of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, which provides a comprehensive and whole-of-mission approach to the protection of civilians. In this perspective, we consider that peacekeepers should be adequately trained and equipped in order to fully implement their protection of civilians mandate, and we commend the launch of the updated *Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook*.

Promoting stronger accountability for serious international humanitarian law and international human rights law violations is another fundamental element of the protection of civilians. In the past, the Security Council has taken significant steps to enhance accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. However, Member States have the primary responsibility for promoting and ensuring accountability and should take concrete, credible and practical actions to this end.

We must fight against impunity for the most serious international crimes, and to continue supporting international justice and accountability mechanisms. It is paramount to conduct credible investigations and prosecutions wherever and whenever international crimes occur in order to prevent the recurrence of these violations and to provide justice to victims, who must be at the centre of our efforts.

Italy has traditionally been at the forefront of the efforts to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict. During our term on the Security Council, in 2017 we promoted the systematic inclusion of provisions on the protection of civilians in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, where necessary, and we submitted resolution 2382 (2017), on an enhanced role for police components in peacekeeping operations, in order to step up the protection of civilians. We are committed to protecting and promoting international humanitarian law and to implementing the principle of accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in situations of armed conflict. In this perspective, Italy ensures its firm support for international justice and accountability mechanisms, including the work and independence of the International Criminal Court as an important actor in the global fight against impunity, and urges all Member States to do the same.

Moreover, Italy shares the deep concern of the international community on the extremely serious humanitarian impact of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. Such impacts are extensive and include both direct damage, in the form of death and injury, and indirect and long-term effects relating to the destruction of essential infrastructure, cultural heritage, loss of services, obstacles to humanitarian intervention, high costs of reconstruction and recovery, displacement and denial of return.

Italy considers that the legal framework applicable to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is clear and that the crux of the matter is to implement it in the changing dynamics of current conflicts. In particular, in the context of the increasing relevance of population-centric warfare, it becomes necessary for States and their armed forces to adapt their policies, doctrines and military tactics to the challenges posed by military operations in populated areas so as to properly take into account civilian vulnerabilities.

We therefore support the ongoing process to develop a political declaration aimed at strengthening the protection of civilians from risks arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It is extremely important to reinforce the collective commitment to addressing civilian harm in urban warfare, reaffirming that the cardinal rules and principles of international humanitarian law must be complied with in all circumstances and by all parties to a conflict and promoting best practices and the highest standards of conduct.

In the context of the protection of civilians, we have to pay special attention to the most vulnerable.

First and foremost, it is a moral imperative to put an end to the worst forms of violations of the rights of children in armed conflict, which not only endanger their lives but also undermine the stability and welfare of societies as a whole, depriving the new generations of their fundamental right to hope for a future after the war. Italy presented an open pledge on the occasion of the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to ensure that children can live safely and enjoy their rights, even in conflict situations. It is fundamental to guarantee that education is provided also in times of war, on the basis of the principles established by the Safe Schools Declaration.

Our commitment to the issue encompasses not only political initiatives and programmes but also specific cooperation projects. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which we celebrate this year, Italy will continue to work with determination, in collaboration with Save the Children and other relevant civil society organizations, to allow children to enjoy their childhood and to hope for a better future, even in times of war. We planned a high-level side event at the last session of the Commission on the Status of Women on violence against girl children in armed conflicts and the role of international criminal justice, in particular the International Criminal Court, which could not take place due to the COVID-19 emergency. It will be rescheduled as soon as possible.

Italy has long supported a policy of zero tolerance against sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations peacekeepers and civilian personnel. We are a committed member of the circle of leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations, and we have signed the related voluntary pact. We are also very proud to be the main contributor to the United Nations trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Finally, to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, we call for the full implementation of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, and we co-sponsored resolution 2475 (2019), on disabled persons and armed conflicts.

To conclude, in order to strengthen the protection of civilians on the ground, which is a cornerstone of the activity of the Security Council and a fundamental duty and responsibility of the international community as a whole, we must keep the protection of civilians high on the Council's agenda, as the spread of the pandemic has further highlighted.

Annex 40**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro**

I would like to begin by thanking Estonia for convening this important meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366).

Since the adoption of the landmark resolution 1265 (1999), the Security Council has reiterated its firm commitment to this important issue by adopting a series of resolutions, including resolution 2286 (2016), on health care in armed conflict, to which Japan contributed as a co-penholder in 2016. It is regrettable that, according to the Secretary-General's report, we see increased attacks against medical and humanitarian personnel and their facilities. Last December, Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, a representative of a Japanese humanitarian non-governmental organization who devoted himself for decades to health care and agricultural development in Afghanistan, was killed in a terrorist attack in Jalalabad. Japan strongly condemns such heinous attacks against aid workers.

Currently, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is causing a serious human security crisis, spreading across borders and striking the weakest segments of society the hardest. Again, it is the people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, women, children, people with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons who are the most vulnerable. Japan strongly urges all parties to armed conflict to respond to the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire. Key provisions of international humanitarian law must be respected to limit the effects of armed conflict on the people and communities fighting against the virus in already fragile situations. In March, Japan provided emergency assistance of \$140 million through United Nations agencies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the COVID-19 response. In April, Japan decided additional assistance of more than \$1.4 billion to support health systems and medical capacity in developing countries.

Last year marked the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Japan is deeply concerned about the frequent occurrence of alleged violations of international humanitarian law, notwithstanding the repeated resolve of the Council with regard to the protection of civilians. At the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent last December, the Japanese Government, together with the Japanese Red Cross Society, made a pledge to promote public awareness through dissemination of the importance of international humanitarian law in order to prevent sexual violence and attacks against humanitarian workers and their facilities in armed conflicts. Japan urges all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law in all circumstances.

Respect for international humanitarian law must be no exception in the context of the emergence of cyberwarfare and new weapons equipped with emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, which may be drastically changing aspects of conflict. At the thirty-third International Conference, Japan also pledged to promote study and dialogue at multiple levels on issues concerning cyberwarfare and the use of new weapons. Japan intends to contribute to the discussion towards establishing new rules in this area. In this regard, Japan plans to host an international conference on lethal autonomous weapons systems later this year.

Furthermore, Japan recognizes the critical role of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission in upholding international humanitarian law and continues to contribute both financially and by nominating the most qualified members to the Commission.

Japan is actively engaged in operational activities to help civilians affected by armed conflict. With a view to ensuring human security, one of the pillars of Japan's development cooperation policy, Japan has always prioritized the protection and empowerment of those affected by armed conflict, in particular refugees and internally displaced persons. At the seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development, held in Yokohama last August, Japan, together with African countries and international donors, committed to supporting efforts for strengthening the self-reliance and resilience of displaced populations and host communities. Japan's contribution in connection with COVID-19, which I mentioned earlier, will also be allocated to support those suffering from armed conflict and other situations of violence in the Middle East and Africa.

The protection of victims of sexual violence in armed conflict is another priority area for Japan from the viewpoint of human security. This year, which marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, Japan reaffirms its unwavering commitment by contributing €2 million to the Global Fund for Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Japan continues to support the work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, under the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Somalia and Iraq. Japan also contributes, through UN-Women, to the protection and empowerment of victims of violent extremism in the Sahel and the Lake Chad region.

Japan will continue to commit itself to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. On the normative side, Japan will continue to work to further disseminate awareness of international humanitarian law, while, on the operational side, we will support the efforts on the ground to ensure and strengthen human security, by protecting and empowering the victims of armed conflicts and by building institutions that will protect the most vulnerable people, including through humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding support. Japan looks forward to working closely with the United Nations in this endeavour.

Annex 41**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations, Mansour Ayyad Alotaibi**

[Original: Arabic]

First, I would like to thank Estonia for convening the open video-teleconference on this important subject and to express appreciation to Her Excellency Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of Estonia, for taking part.

Kuwait aligns itself with the joint statement circulated by Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

This annual open debate provides the Security Council and, more broadly, States Members of the United Nations with a unique opportunity to have a frank discussion about the current situation with regard to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, enhance compliance with international law and related accountability measures, and propose tangible steps to ensure that the protection of civilians agenda is implemented by Member States, the United Nations and other stakeholders, based on the Secretary-General's annual report on the subject, in particular given the new challenges we face with the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Today's meeting is taking place in unprecedented circumstances, as the United Nations and the international community continue to combat the spread of COVID-19 worldwide. The virus not only poses a grave threat to the health of us all. It is also exacerbating the security and safety challenges facing civilians because of ongoing armed conflicts. For that reason, the protection of civilians agenda has taken on even greater importance. Kuwait welcomes and continues to support the appeal by the Secretary-General, António Guterres, for an immediate global ceasefire in the light of the pandemic. It urges the Security Council, as the United Nations body entrusted with maintaining international peace and security, to support that call.

This meeting marks the first time that Kuwait has participated in an open debate of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict since its term as a non-permanent member of the Council for the period 2018–2019 came to a close. During that time, it has contributed actively to the protection of civilians agenda by sponsoring, alongside the Netherlands, Sweden and Côte d'Ivoire, resolution 2417 (2018) on conflict and hunger.

It also sponsored resolution 2474 (2019), on missing persons in armed conflict, which was adopted unanimously on 11 June 2019. That resolution, which was inspired by a desire to strengthen the institutional and normative framework for the protection of civilians and by our country's own bitter experience, which continues to be a source of suffering for many Kuwaitis, was the first to be issued by the Council specifically addressing the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. In it, the Council calls on all parties to armed conflict to take appropriate measures to prevent persons from going missing, to actively search for persons reported missing, to enable the return of their remains, and to ensure impartial and effective investigations and the prosecution of offences linked to missing persons as a result of armed conflict. Another aim of the resolution is to reaffirm the relevant rules of international humanitarian and human rights law.

We welcome the level of detail in the section on missing persons in this year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/366), but note that there has been no let-up in the alarming number of cases of persons who have gone missing in armed conflicts over the past year. Member States should therefore ensure that they have appropriate national laws and policies to prevent persons from going missing. We

encourage all parties concerned to take the measures necessary to address this issue in line with resolution 2474 (2019).

Aside from the issue of missing persons, the Secretary-General paints a bleak picture in his annual report of the current situation with regard to the protection of civilians. The global civilian death toll and numbers of wounded and displaced persons remain unacceptably high. In that regard, Kuwait would like to underscore the following points.

First, we reiterate the importance of ensuring compliance with the relevant provisions of international law and accountability for violations in situations of armed conflict. It is clear from the report of the Secretary-General that the suffering of civilians could be greatly reduced if all parties to conflicts respected international humanitarian and human rights law. There must be accountability for crimes committed in violation of that law so as to ensure that justice is served and victims have recourse to legal redress. As underlined in the report, those factors remain the most pressing challenges to strengthening the protection of civilians. We therefore urge the Security Council to continue to take effective measures to ensure compliance with international law and to develop the accountability measures necessary to strengthen effective protection of conflict-affected populations, in particular in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Secondly, we recall that violence and armed conflict, along with other factors such as bureaucracy and certain obstacles caused by sanctions and counter-terrorism measures, continue to hinder access to humanitarian aid. We therefore call on the Security Council to urge the parties to armed conflicts to ensure that humanitarian aid and goods are delivered to civilians in need wherever they are, and to condemn ongoing violence against humanitarian workers and assets, including killings, attacks, arbitrary detention, theft and the commandeering by the military of humanitarian sites. We call again for use of the veto to be refrained from when it comes to questions of access to humanitarian aid for civilians in need and under siege in times of conflict.

Thirdly and last, we welcome the Secretary-General's increased focus in his report on new technologies and their impact on armed conflict. Some digital technologies have contributed to the protection of civilians and provided a range of opportunities for clear reporting on the number of victims and cases of missing persons. They have, however, also been misused by certain parties to conflicts, aggravating violence in some areas. We therefore call on the Security Council to stress the need to address the harmful misuse of digital technology and ensure that those new tools are used in compliance with existing obligations under international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

In conclusion, we urge all members of the Security Council to intensify their efforts to ensure that innocent civilians do not pay the price for conflicts in which they have unwittingly been caught up and that the protection of civilians agenda is implemented fully. As we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, it is vital that we unite our efforts and mobilize the political will needed to strengthen the protection of civilians trapped amid endless conflicts around the world. Kuwait stands ready to continue to support those efforts.

Annex 42**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations, Mirgul Moldoisaeva**

First of all, let me express my gratitude to the Republic of Estonia for the invitation to the today's open debate of the Security Council. We commend you, Sir, for the choice of this very timely and critical issue for consideration on this month's agenda during your presidency.

I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Peace Laureate and member of the Elders, for their very informative addresses.

Let me thank the organizers of today's event for the opportunity to speak on the important topic of "Protection of civilians in armed conflict".

The advent and rapid spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on a global scale have had a severe impact on the protection of civilians in conflict-affected States. We note with deep concern the continued spread of the coronavirus pandemic in all regions of the world, which poses a great threat to human health and safety. It is obvious that people in conflict-affected States are paying the highest price in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, and this is happening against the backdrop of ongoing armed conflicts.

The current situation requires the immediate unification of our efforts and the adoption of decisive actions by the whole international community. In this matter, the central role of the United Nations and the Security Council cannot be underestimated. The Kyrgyz Republic therefore supports Secretary-General Guterres's call for a global ceasefire and enhanced international cooperation to successfully counter the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, armed conflicts in different regions are causing increasing pain and concern in the international community. In the unstable situations in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Gaza, Africa and Afghanistan, armed conflicts and terrorist attacks claim the lives of innocent citizens every day and increase the number of refugees. Continuing armed conflicts around the world highlight the need for timely and effective measures for the protection of civilians.

We strongly condemn all acts of violence against civilians and call on the international community to join efforts for the swiftest possible resolution of armed conflicts through dialogue and negotiation between the conflicting sides. In this regard, Kyrgyzstan fully supports all initiatives of the international community to resolve the conflicts and protect civilians.

We believe that the protection of civilians must continue to underpin the work of the Council and the international community. All States Members of the United Nations need to ensure the protection of women, children and persons with disabilities during armed conflict and take serious response measures to protect medical personnel and medical infrastructure. In our view, respect for human rights, including equality and non-discrimination, access to basic life services, disarmament, mediation and other tools can play a vital role in conflict prevention.

We believe that, given the existing and emerging centres of instability around the world, the role of the United Nations should be strengthened as much as possible. In that regard, we support the peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflicts and crises around the world by promoting, under the auspices of the United Nations, dialogue among all political and military forces.

The Kyrgyz Republic pays great attention to preventive diplomacy, peacebuilding and peacemaking, and the protection of civilians. In 2003, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic established the Interdepartmental Commission for the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law. One of the functions of the Commission is to consider issues related to the implementation of the international obligations of the Kyrgyz Republic in the field of international humanitarian law. The Commission's activities are based on such principles as humanity, non-discrimination and the protection of victims of armed conflicts, of civilians, of medical personnel and of civilian objects.

We have ratified eight of the nine international human rights treaties. On 7 May 2019, Kyrgyzstan ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2018, we successfully completed our term on the Human Rights Council. According to data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, this year Kyrgyzstan became the first country in the world to resolve its stateless problem, having reduced the number of stateless persons from 13,000 to zero over the past five years. We have positive experience of participating in the settlement of international and local conflicts, in United Nations peacekeeping operations and within the framework of the Peacebuilding Fund, and we are also contributing to the process of restoring Afghanistan.

We highly appreciate the work of the ICRC in Kyrgyzstan. The ICRC supports the national authorities in disseminating knowledge and information about international humanitarian law. In particular, the ICRC provides technical support to the armed forces with the aim of integrating international humanitarian law into their operational documents. With the support of the ICRC, seminars are held on the law of armed conflict and on the protection of civilians, as are information sessions on international humanitarian law, which helps to increase the level of training of military personnel of units and military command-and-control bodies. Ongoing ICRC projects and programmes in the country are relevant and important, including in the field of humanitarian law, emergency situations and the penitentiary system.

We believe it is essential that the international community focus greater attention on preventing conflicts and protecting civilians in armed conflicts.

We are keen to harness the potential and experience of the United Nations and other international partners with regard to the specifics of our national development and the historical and cultural traits peculiar to the Kyrgyz Republic. Our active and productive cooperation with the United Nations system is evident in the growing presence of its institutions in our country. We intend to continue our joint work, and we are very interested in the possibility of attracting additional structures and expanding the United Nations presence in our country.

The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic intends to continue to support and continue active work in cooperation with all Member States, the United Nations system and all international partners to achieve our goals.

Annex 43**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Latvia to the United Nations**

We wish to congratulate Estonia on its successful and impressive presidency of the Security Council. Estonia's example demonstrates that smaller countries contribute substantively to international peace and security. I thank you, Sir, for your excellent leadership this month and for convening this important debate.

It has been more than 20 years since the Security Council included the protection of civilians in armed conflict on its agenda, recognizing it as a matter of peace and security. We thank the Estonian presidency for organizing this annual debate and for doing it at the beginning of the protection of civilians week despite the global hardships we all face at the moment.

Latvia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Latvia supports the Secretary-General's call for an immediate ceasefire across the globe in the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) outlines the realities on the ground and the ongoing challenges and increasing risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We strongly concur with the Secretary-General that we have the tools to strengthen the protection of civilians, but all we need is strong political will.

And yet political will is what many struggle to exhibit. States are the ones that bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations. According to the latest report, 2019 was yet another year of suffering; civilians continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflicts and suffer devastating consequences. More than 20,000 civilians were killed or injured in 10 conflict-affected areas, including Syria, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Libya, Yemen and Ukraine. We need to be determined to address those situations, act promptly and demand accountability.

We are extremely concerned about direct and indirect attacks against civilians, civilian infrastructure, journalists and humanitarian and medical personnel during armed conflicts, including in the light of COVID-19. Deeply disturbing methods of warfare such as sexual and gender-based violence, harassment and rape, terror, starvation and torture are still being used and often go unpunished. Women and girls face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence during conflict.

A robust implementation of the women and peace and security agenda is crucial and must be a priority. To further strengthen our efforts in this area, Latvia recently became a member of the Group of Friends for Women, Peace and Security, chaired by Canada. The reduction of gender-based violence was also Latvia's priority during its presidency last year of the Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty, which resulted in a consensual action plan to tackle gender-based violence, including the gendered impact of armed violence and conflict, as well as specific aspects of risk assessment related to gender-based violence in considering the issuance of export licences.

We must work tirelessly to reverse the aforementioned appalling trends and ensure respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. We reaffirm our strong support for the international justice and accountability mechanisms, including the work of the International Criminal Court.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is an integral part of the Security Council's agenda. The prevention of conflicts; the existing challenges to the protection

of civilians in various conflict-affected areas; and accountability for violations against civilians are matters that should be addressed with a sense of urgency.

In that context, we remain deeply concerned by the continual suffering of civilians in Syria. We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as concluded in the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team to the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and to the Secretary-General (S/2020/310, enclosure). The use of chemical weapons by anyone is a brutal violation of international law, and those responsible for such terrible crimes must be held accountable.

We remain deeply concerned about the deterioration of the human rights situation in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea as well as in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions currently not under the control of the Ukrainian Government. Thousands of civilians have been killed and wounded in the conflict. We call on the authorities of the Russian Federation, as the occupying Power in Crimea, to end all human rights violations and abide by international law. It is essential that the international community maintain pressure on Russia until Ukraine's sovereignty is fully restored and secured within its internationally recognized borders.

Libya remains a matter of great concern owing to the growing number of indiscriminate attacks against civilians, the increased violence and the escalation of hostilities in the past couple of weeks. We strongly condemn the shelling of residential areas by General Haftar and the forces aligned with him and any other attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Such activities undermine further efforts towards sustainable peace. We call on all actors to de-escalate hostilities and fully implement the United Nations-sanctioned arms embargo and their commitments in line with the Berlin process.

The protection of civilians is also an important component of United Nations peacekeeping operations and can be strengthened by the implementation of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and the Action for Peacekeeping initiative Declaration. Latvia will continue its support by contributing experts to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has given rise to a new set of challenges that negatively affect the protection of civilians. We must focus our efforts on tackling the worst impacts on the most vulnerable and ensure that adherence to international law prevails, especially now.

In addition to other unprecedented challenges, States face growing liabilities in the digital sphere. According to statistics, today 4.57 billion people are active Internet users. Digital technologies can and should provide us with the means for everyday communication and sources of reliable information. However, the report recognizes the countless hidden vulnerabilities that cyberspace presents and the risk that it could become a tool for manipulation, recruitment and the spread of violence.

It is essential to counter intolerance, hate speech and the dangerous spread of misinformation. Latvia supports the recent initiative by the Secretary-General on COVID-19 communications in this regard. It is the responsibility of States to provide an orderly cyberspace based on international law and on building digital literacy and resilience to protect its population.

While digital technologies have provided unprecedented opportunities for citizens and Governments, challenges lie in the possibility of their multiple applications. For instance, we can see that the same technology may be used in self-driving cars and in autonomous military systems with inbuilt lethal functionality.

These very complex issues are currently being discussed within the framework of the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE on LAWS). Latvia is contributing to that international discussion by chairing the GGE on LAWS process in 2020. In his report, the Secretary-General outlines the importance of retaining human control over the use of lethal force. That is one of the main topics of the international experts' debate in the GGE on LAWS this year and dovetails with the attempts being made to protect civilians in armed conflict.

We cannot become detached from human suffering and calls for help. The international community must step up its commitment to provide stronger protection to civilians and implement the comprehensive recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report.

It is a fundamental legal obligation and in our common interest to promote and ensure the effective protection of civilians.

Annex 44**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, Amal Mudallali**

Lebanon commends Estonia for having organized this open debate. The high-level participation therein testifies to the centrality of this item on the agenda of the Security Council and of the United Nations in general.

The topic is timely because even a pandemic could not stop conflicts around the world or stop civilian suffering. The Security Council should prioritize this agenda and make it central to all peace and security issues under its consideration, since the number of civilian deaths, injuries and trauma as a result of armed conflict continues to be staggering, as illustrated in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366).

Compliance with existing international legal instruments, particularly international humanitarian law, international human rights law and Security Council resolutions, remains a crucial way to ensure the protection of civilians. The Security Council should therefore ensure that those instruments are implemented and respected. It can do so through greater coordination with the relevant regional organizations and concerned Member States.

But this is not a matter of legality and international law only; it is a moral issue and goes to the heart of what makes us human and decent. Ethics and morality have to be integral to human behaviour, especially during conflict. We need to insert morality into the language of protection and of the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

When we in Lebanon speak about the protection of civilians, we do so from our long experience with wars and invasions. Lebanese civilians have paid the heavy price of years of blatant violations of international law, with countless indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by the Israeli forces. The shelling of a United Nations compound in the village of Qana in 1996 resulted in the deaths of more than 100 Lebanese civilians — including children — and injuries to hundreds more, including United Nations peacekeepers. Ten years later, in 2006, Qana was once again bombed by the Israeli forces, which resulted, again, in the deaths of children and civilians.

Millions of cluster bombs were dropped on Lebanese territory. Even the environment was not spared, with the destruction of the Jiyeh power plant, which resulted in a massive oil spill on Lebanese shores and beyond.

And yet all those crimes against the civilian population, against the environment and against the territorial integrity of a country were committed without any accountability or remedy in sight. Accountability is fundamental to putting an end to impunity and to giving victims the justice that they deserve. Accountability mechanisms must be put in place and supported by the Security Council, without double standards.

The same could be said of the situation in the occupied Palestinian State, where Palestinian generations have grown up living under the constant violations of their rights by the occupying Power, in total breach of its obligations under international law, hence the importance of ensuring respect of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect Palestinian civilians and guarantee their rights.

In the absence of specific legislation and standards regarding the use of new technologies and weapons in a context of armed conflict, we believe that the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution should apply. Prevention

must continue to be at the core of our efforts, and we must continue to address the root causes of conflicts. National policy frameworks that are consistent with regional and international strategies can help in that regard and could be developed through an inclusive approach, with the participation of the Government, the United Nations, civil society, youth and women representatives. Security Council and regional organizations could support States in the implementation of such frameworks.

As stressed by the Secretary-General in paragraph 67 of his report,

“The most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflict.”

It also brought into better focus the Secretary-General’s call for a humanitarian ceasefire. He rightly pointed out that the pandemic has shown the folly of war. However, it also showed how vulnerable humans are and that protecting them should be the highest responsibility today and tomorrow.

Annex 45**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations, Christian Wenaweser**

Liechtenstein associates itself with the statement read out by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

The situation with regard to the protection of civilians must be seen in the context of the severe impact of the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The virus is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities while also exemplifying global interdependence and demonstrating the need for solidarity. Measures to support vulnerable populations are urgently needed, including through the provision of water and sanitation, and by ensuring access to health care and health services and enhancing protections from gender-based violence. Refugees and displaced people as well as those who are detained face a particularly difficult task in finding safe ways to self-isolate and avoid infection.

Liechtenstein places on record our support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in order to help create conditions conducive to the delivery of aid and prise open a space for diplomacy in intractable armed conflicts. We hope to see its implementation by all relevant parties without distinction on the basis of actors or situations. A virus that spreads without discrimination must be met by a global ceasefire that does not discriminate.

The consideration of the impact of COVID-19 on the protection of civilians should make us reflect on our understanding of the notion of security. Never have more people felt more insecure than in the last three months, and never have we been less prepared to offer an effective response. Our definition of security must be human-centred and go far beyond measures to address the immediate threat of armed violence. Food security, climate action, economic security and universal access to health care should be key ingredients of our understanding of human security.

Conflict-related sexual violence continues to be a blight on many of the world's most severe conflicts. We appreciate that the Secretary-General has brought awareness to its prevalence for men and boys, given the distinct stigmas that they may suffer as a result; we will continue work with the Liechtenstein-based non-governmental organization All Survivors Project to highlight this understudied issue. Liechtenstein is also proud to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration as it marks its fifth anniversary. We underline the need for all parties to conflict to fully comply with international humanitarian law and for the Council to ensure accountability in cases of non-compliance.

The ongoing imperatives of prevention and accountability must not be obscured by the need for immediate protection measures. The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group code of conduct regarding Security Council action against mass atrocity crimes, which is supported by 121 States, including two thirds of the current Security Council members, remains highly relevant in this respect. Liechtenstein continues to call on non-signatories to sign the code.

Liechtenstein is pleased that the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366) emphasizes once again the need to enhance accountability and that it references the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. It is worth remembering that the Mechanism was created by the General Assembly in the light of a deadlocked Security Council unable to pull the levers of accountability available to it, in particular a referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The fact that this section of the Secretary-General's report does not highlight any Council actions in many years should serve as a wakeup call to a body that increasingly

seems asleep at the wheel on questions of accountability. Liechtenstein emphasizes the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General with respect to Council referrals to the ICC — a meaningful tool when supported by follow-up action in the Council. The principle of complementarity — that is, the primary responsibility of national judiciaries to investigate and prosecute — offers the Council many more opportunities in its engagement with States, both during and after armed conflict.

Annex 46**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, Audra Plepytė**

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

The protection of civilians has been systematically addressed in the Security Council for more than 20 years, yet thousands of civilians are still dying as a result of armed conflicts that too often are in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. The international community has indeed taken a number of important steps for the protection of women, children, internally displaced persons, refugees, journalists and media professionals. Nevertheless, we need to keep strengthening the normative framework and its implementation, and continue to examine what more can be done. In that context, I would like to mention the three most pertinent aspects related to the protection of civilians for Lithuania: the protection of journalists, peacekeeping and the fight against impunity.

Protecting civilians is not possible without protecting journalists during conflict. Today we mark five years since the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2222 (2015), drafted by Lithuania, putting out a call for all Member States to create a safe environment — both in law and in practice — for journalists to carry out their important functions. Attacks against journalists and media workers, like attacks against civilians, constitute crimes against humanity and undermine the ability of the international community to understand and respond effectively to conflicts that threaten international peace and security.

The spread of radical extremism and terrorism undeniably adds a highly dangerous dimension to the threats facing journalists and media workers. However, many of the journalists killed in the past decade were local journalists targeted for covering conflict, corruption or gang violence in their own communities. Impunity remains widespread. With more than 1,000 journalists and media workers killed worldwide over the past decade and only one case out of 10 legally prosecuted, the level of impunity for crimes against journalists remains appallingly high. That creates a climate of fear among journalists and has a negative impact on the whole society, as impunity for crimes against journalists is detrimental to the freedom of opinion and expression online and offline, in general. It demonstrates that, despite significant progress in international legal frameworks, the lack of safety for journalists on the ground remains worrisome and requires the attention of the international community.

Lithuania co-founded the cross-regional Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists in 2016, inspired primarily by the goals of resolution 2222 (2015) and in response to the lack of safety for journalists worldwide. The Group is working closely with United Nations entities, representatives of media organizations and non-governmental organizations to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including through the appropriate implementation of the resolutions on the protection of journalists and the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, adopted under the auspices of UNESCO. It also seeks to increase international awareness of the severe violations of the human rights of journalists and media workers worldwide. In April, four Groups of Friends for the Protection of Journalists — at the United Nations in Geneva and New York, UNESCO in Paris and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna — released their first joint statement denouncing attempts by certain States to use the fight against COVID-19 as a pretext for limiting the freedom of expression and persecuting journalists.

Let me also underline that Lithuania remains grateful to the Secretary-General for his continuous leadership in the area of the protection of journalists and for his activation of the relevant Focal Points Network within the United Nations system.

Allow me to turn now to peacekeeping. Given the increasing complexity of today's conflicts, the effective implementation of the protection of civilians is as challenging as ever. In many ways, it has become the most visible standard by which the performance of United Nations peacekeeping is often judged. Lithuania is a strong supporter of the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative, which includes strengthening the protection provided by peacekeeping operations as one of its priority areas.

Predeployment and in-mission training of peacekeepers remains essential. Training in behavioural, social, and attitudinal skills, as well as in other relevant skills and tools such as intelligence and communication, is critical. Those tools, offered by the United Nations or troop- and police-contributing countries, help to ensure that peacekeeping personnel are equipped to interact with vulnerable people and at-risk populations, and that through that interaction they can provide appropriate protection. Lithuania takes the training of peacekeepers extremely seriously. Nearly 300 Lithuanian peacekeepers have received comprehensive predeployment training on their practical and legal commitments with respect to the civilian population on the ground, per United Nations guidelines.

The Security Council's efforts to give practical meaning to the protection agenda would be useless without increased accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We cannot succeed in protecting civilians when those who commit abuses, crimes and atrocities know they can get away with such crimes. The Council has a critical role to play in bringing the perpetrators to account by taking a strong and systematic position on ending impunity for war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights. My delegation reiterates its call to restrain the use of the veto in situations where such crimes are committed.

Perpetrators of crimes against civilian populations and those who attack and kill journalists and humanitarian and medical workers must know that there is no escaping justice. National and international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, have an important role to play in that sphere. In that regard, we welcome the international cooperation that led to the arrest and trial of Félicien Kabuga for genocide and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in Rwanda in 1994. Ending impunity is also essential for protecting civilians. Lithuania is determined to persecute perpetrators of mass atrocities. Our national courts are imposing real sanctions on the perpetrators of war crimes.

In conclusion, we must admit that current international efforts to ensure accountability remain insufficient and do not meet the bar set by legally binding international treaties. In that regard, we call on all State and non-State actors to intensify efforts to ensure accountability for violations of international law. We urge the members of the Security Council, the Secretary-General and all the States Members of the United Nations to take determined action to strengthen the protection of civilians and stand up for the norms and laws that are essential for safeguarding civilians in conflict.

Annex 47**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations**

On behalf of the Government of Malta, I thank Estonia for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Malta recognizes the importance of holding regular constructive discussions on this matter, as civilians are the ones who bear the brunt of conflict. In that connection, we welcome the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2020/366) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Malta fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and would like to add a few additional remarks in our national capacity.

Malta remains deeply concerned about the devastating impact on, and the ongoing suffering of, civilians due to the conflicts in Libya and Syria. The fact that attacks on civilians, hospitals, medical facilities, schools and refugee camps continue, in complete violation of international law and international humanitarian law, is completely unacceptable.

Malta stresses the need for all parties to conflicts to ensure the protection of civilians and respect the principles of distinction between civilians and combatants, proportionality and precaution. In 2019, tens of thousands of civilians were affected by conflict around the world. In addition, the coronavirus disease pandemic has further exacerbated the vulnerability of people in conflict zones.

Women and girls in particular have always been subject to sexual and gender-based violence, which has been adopted repeatedly over the years as a war tactic. Malta remains deeply concerned about reports of increased violence against women and girls, especially in conflict-affected areas, where there is little social cohesion and services are limited. We call on all partners to ensure widespread compliance with commitments undertaken within the highest organs of the United Nations system in order to address gender-based violence in conflict.

Furthermore, Malta remains committed to the Secretary-General's view that the effective implementation of the women and peace and security agenda needs to remain a priority throughout this period. As previously stated, Malta intends to launch its first women and peace and security action plan this year.

Malta also underlines the importance of protecting children in armed conflict. It remains unacceptable that, for thousands of children born in the last decade, living in a war-torn country is normal. Daily bombings are normal. Fleeing homes is normal. Forced disappearances are normal. Sexual violence is normal. Not knowing where the next meal will come from is normal. No access to clean water and sanitation is normal. Political settlements may end wars, but the psychological and social consequences of conflicts will be felt for decades. During the past year, children were once again exposed to a multitude of violations, including killings, maimings and sexual violence, as well as forced displacement.

Mental health and psychosocial support will need to play a more central role in peacebuilding efforts, especially when it comes to women, children and vulnerable groups.

In our view, the principle of accountability remains fundamental. It must be implemented and further strengthened, as serious crimes and violations of humanitarian law cannot go unpunished. Credible investigations are needed in order to ensure that victims get the justice they deserve. Peace without justice is fragile and short-lived. We must therefore take concrete steps in that regard.

Malta fully supports the global call for peace made by the Secretary-General in March, in which he emphasized the need “to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives.” We also join Special Representative Gamba in urging the inclusion of child protection provisions, such as securing the release of all children associated with parties to conflict, prioritizing their reintegration and immediately ending their recruitment and abuse.

The best way to protect civilians is prevention. We urge all States and parties to armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law at all times. We recall their obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. Finally, we urge them to allow the unhindered provision of life-saving assistance such as medicines, food and fuel for civilian purposes throughout the country and across conflict lines.

We have the tools to protect civilians, even in situations of armed conflict. The international community must act today to mitigate the impact of conflict on civilians when possible, prevent their involvement in future conflicts and assist affected civilians in recovering from violent conflict.

Annex 48**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

This debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict is taking place at a critical moment for humankind, which is facing an invisible threat that is already having a devastating impact worldwide.

The pandemic poses an enormous additional challenge for millions of human beings living in situations of armed conflict. If we are to effectively combat the pandemic, we must support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. It is for the sake of humankind. We welcome the fact that some have not ignored the call and are focusing efforts on saving lives. Unfortunately, others have not only ignored it but have even taken advantage of the distraction provided by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis to escalate conflicts and ensure the restocking of weapons. That is absolutely unacceptable, and the international community should strongly condemn that practice.

Civilians in armed conflict are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. COVID-19 could have apocalyptic implications in some States whose medical infrastructure has been devastated after years of fighting. We therefore reiterate our strong condemnation of all attacks on medical infrastructure and medical personnel. Such attacks are grave violations of international humanitarian law and constitute war crimes. Civilians risk being held hostage both to war and to a medical crisis. Strict observance of international humanitarian law and international human rights is therefore critical. Accountability mechanisms, including legal remedies, must also be bolstered. The Security Council must assume its responsibility to address impunity by exercising its power to refer cases to the International Criminal Court.

Mexico also strongly calls for the non-use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas because of their direct impact and humanitarian consequences for civilians, as well as the damage they cause to the critical civilian and medical infrastructure needed to combat the pandemic.

We recognize the heroic work and sacrifice of humanitarian and health workers in these particularly adverse circumstances. We will not tire of repeating that humanitarian assistance can never be held hostage to the political interests of the Council.

We are concerned about the impact that additional restrictions on movement may have on the capacity of humanitarian and protection actors to fulfil their mandates, and about the potential implications for vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. We must not allow the fight against COVID-19 to also result in an increase in gender-based violence, sexual abuse and human rights violations.

Mexico expresses its concern about the pandemic's potential impact on the work of peacekeeping operations. While it is necessary to take all precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus, it is essential that peacekeeping operations continue to carry out their essential tasks in the area of peace and security, especially those dedicated to the protection of civilians. That requires a certain margin of flexibility in the adaptability of mandates and the pending rotation of troops.

Finally, we stress the importance of the effective implementation of resolution 74/274, recently adopted by the General Assembly for the benefit of civilians in armed conflict. It is critical that all the necessary measures be taken to avoid denial

of access to essential drugs, vaccines, personal protective equipment and medical equipment to combat COVID-19.

The Security Council cannot remain paralysed amid the suffering of millions of human beings in conflict situations, especially when it acts on behalf of the entire international community. As such, there is only one alternative — to act now.

Annex 49**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, Omar Hilale**

[Original: French]

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Estonia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the first time in its history and to thank its delegation for organizing today's important debate, the theme of which fits perfectly with the priorities of its mandate, namely, as presented to us, respect for international standards, the fight against impunity, the defence of human rights, addressing environmental issues and the improvement of the working methods of the Security Council. The statement by the President of the Republic of Estonia also demonstrates the country's unwavering commitment to the protection of civilians.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing, which took stock of the current status of the protection of civilians and highlighted the challenges that the international community continues to face in that regard, as also outlined in his report (S/2020/366). My thanks also go to the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, and to President Johnson Sirleaf, member of The Elders and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, for their particularly relevant briefings.

One year after the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which placed the protection of civilians on the Council's agenda, we note that significant normative progress continues to be made, thanks in particular to the commitment of the Council, with the support of all States Members of the United Nations and also of civil society. Indeed, the numerous resolutions and presidential statements, together with the crafting of specific protection-of-civilians mandates in certain missions, have made it possible to establish a robust legal regulatory framework.

However, it must be noted that, despite these advances, civilian populations continue to be victims of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, with a continuous increase in the numbers of victims, displaced persons and refugees. This situation is likely to worsen further with the coronavirus disease and its short- and medium-term consequences, particularly when it comes to the dynamics of conflicts. It has been noted that some actors are trying to take advantage of this unprecedented situation to advance their agendas, despite the Secretary-General's call for a comprehensive ceasefire, to which Morocco fully subscribes. The efforts of the international community must also continue to take into account sexual violence in times of conflict and pay particular attention to the most vulnerable, especially children and women.

Given that the protection of civilians is primarily the responsibility of the States concerned, it is important to strengthen their capacities, if necessary, and always at their request. It would therefore be worthwhile to further explore the potential of the Peacebuilding Commission in this respect. Furthermore, Member States should develop national policies based on good practices and set up institutional bodies to work on the protection of civilians, while continuing and strengthening mechanisms at the regional and international levels.

The States concerned can also rely on peacekeeping operations if necessary. Peacekeeping operations remain an essential tool, although they are not always deployed to locations where populations are at risk. The priorities in the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations that are mandated to provide such protection are now well established, and a significant body of policy and guidance has been

developed. It is worth noting the publication last week of the new version of the handbook entitled *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*. As a long-established troop-contributing country in United Nations peace operations, allow me to share the following points with the Council.

First, just over 20 years ago, the Security Council gave the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone the first specific mandate on the protection of civilians. Since then, the protection of civilians by peacekeeping operations has developed significantly. Today more than 90 per cent of peacekeepers are deployed in missions with a mandate to protect civilians, and these mandates are often cited as priority tasks for missions in the various theatres where this is necessary.

Secondly, the protection of civilians requires adequate human and financial resources, whether in terms of the number of Blue Helmets deployed or of their equipment and their training. It is also necessary to be able to manage the expectations of all parties involved, be they local populations, host country authorities or Security Council members.

Thirdly, the changing nature of conflicts requires us to constantly review our methods and processes. The United Nations has embarked upon a reform of its peace and security architecture that gives the protection of civilians an important place. The Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative takes this into account, as does the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

The role of humanitarians is also essential. Morocco firmly denounces the attacks on humanitarian personnel, which have experienced a worrisome upsurge. Humanitarian workers' detention, abduction or even murder continue to seriously hamper humanitarian operations. In this regard, immediate measures must be taken to ensure humanitarian workers' safety. Another important aspect is humanitarian access, which is too often denied. In addition, States are obliged to fulfil their obligation to combat impunity and fully investigate and prosecute anyone responsible for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, or systematic and serious violations of human rights.

Fighting impunity means, in part, putting in place strong justice and accountability mechanisms. In some cases, such international mechanisms as the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, sanctions regimes and hybrid mechanisms such as the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic can be tools at our disposal.

Refugee and displaced populations need special attention, especially in this period of pandemic, because even in normal times they are extremely vulnerable to violations of their rights. The international community has an obligation to ensure that all their rights are respected and that the aid provided to them actually reaches them and is not misappropriated or subject to spoliation. The registration of refugee populations is a *sine qua non* for ensuring these rights, as recognized in international law and in Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Lastly, as has been pointed out, in order to assess threats and coordinate the actions of the various actors, the best protection remains prevention. The preventive dimension can be carried out through capacity-building in the countries concerned, respect for the rule of law, good governance, the entrenching of a culture of human rights and the establishment of early-warning mechanisms that can detect pre-conflict situations and prevent them from turning into violent conflict. We take this opportunity to reiterate our full backing for the Secretary-General's policy of increasing support for mediation and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In conclusion, Morocco salutes all those who are working to protect populations in conflict zones and pays them sustained tribute.

Annex 50**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, Amrit Bahadur Rai**

I would like to begin by thanking the Estonian presidency for organizing today's high-level video-teleconference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and Nobel Peace Laureate and member of The Elders, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for their briefings. I also welcome the annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366).

We are at one of the most difficult junctures in human history. Due to the coronavirus-disease pandemic, the protection of civilians has become the foremost priority of every country, whether it be at peace or in conflict. The impacts of this invisible enemy threaten to reverse the achievements of years of rigorous diplomatic efforts aimed at sustaining peace. Poor and vulnerable countries had already been struggling when they had to take up the fight against this pandemic and strive to provide proper health services and economic relief to their citizens. In addition to this, there is a danger that the pandemic will support destabilizing factors that fuel frustration and create instability. The cases of gender-based violence and discrimination against the vulnerable segments of populations are already on the rise.

In this context, we must ensure that the pandemic not be used as a pretext to inflict pain and suffering on civilians. The most vulnerable people, particularly children, women, the sick and the wounded, should be given special attention. Moreover, civilians' right to food and unhindered access to health and medical facilities should not be compromised under any circumstances. Above all, the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights law should be upheld in all circumstances.

Nepal expresses its support for the international normative framework for the protection of civilians and underscores the need to reinforce existing standards and their effective implementation. The State has the primary responsibility for protecting its civilians and preventing violence against them. Perpetrators should be held accountable and brought to justice.

The capacity of national Governments to develop and implement national policy frameworks on the protection of civilians should be strengthened. In this regard, States Members of the United Nations and regional institutions should share their experience and good practices with each other.

Nepal's experience from its nationally led peace process has proved the significance of the promotion of social harmony, tolerance and understanding for ensuring the protection of civilians in conflicts and peace processes alike. The local community should be informed and involved, as they are directly or indirectly affected by conflicts and their aftermaths. Local community leaders, youth and women's organizations have a crucial role to play in strengthening the social fabric.

Furthermore, the investments in education, awareness programmes and employment generation are the most prudent that can be made to protect civilians in the long run. Moreover, inclusive policies relating to all issues of social life, including in public governance, must be adopted and promoted.

As one of the major contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Nepal takes every measure to prevent the exploitation of civilians by keeping its peacekeepers highly professional, including through vetting, predeployment and in-theatre awareness training on applicable provisions of international humanitarian

law and human rights law as well as through robust punitive measures for those convicted in sexual exploitation and abuse cases.

In conclusion, I wish to highlight the importance of providing peacekeeping missions with proper and adequate resources for implementing their mandates, including their protection-of-civilians mandates, at this difficult hour. This will also help the peacekeeping missions support host Governments in their fight against the pandemic.

Annex 51

Statement by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of Nigeria to the United Nations, Samson Sunday Iteboje

We thank the delegation of Estonia for organizing today's important debate. Our appreciation goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and Nobel Peace Laureate, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for sharing their perspectives on this very important subject.

I commend health-care workers, Member States, United Nations agencies, civil society, the private sector and, in particular, the World Health Organization for providing vital support and services to defeat the coronavirus-disease (COVID-19) pandemic. As we contend with COVID-19 and its far-reaching effects, Nigeria calls on all Member States and parties to conflict to join and support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

It is a matter of grave concern that conflict situations expose civilians to killings, kidnappings, torture, sexual exploitation, trafficking and other dangers. This is particularly the case where non-State armed groups are involved. Their complete disregard for international law, in particular international humanitarian law, highlights the challenge they pose to the protection of civilians in conflict situations.

It is also an unfortunate reality that women and girls are the most affected groups in conflict situations. Accordingly, we acknowledge the Security Council's commitment to the protection of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, as exemplified by the adoption, inter alia, of resolutions 1325 (2000), 1960 (2010) and 2122 (2013).

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is an obligation that requires the collective efforts of various stakeholders. Indeed, close collaboration among the Security Council, the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, troop- and police-contributing countries and their respective missions, as well as such regional organizations as the African Union, is vital to the success of protection-of-civilians mandates. It should be underscored that a clear and common understanding of protection mandates is fundamental to the effectiveness of missions.

In this regard, we strongly support community engagement in promoting the protection of civilians. Community-alert networks and community-liaison assistance are vital to understanding perceptions of threat at the community level, including how communities seek to reduce risks and how peace operations can address them. We urge the international community to continue to recognize these imperatives.

Nigeria endorses the Secretary-General's emphasis on preventive measures to stop armed conflicts. We wish to state in this regard that the efforts aimed at protecting civilians in armed conflicts require that the conditions that allow these conflicts to thrive be brought to an end. In other words, beyond the law enforcement approach, dealing with the political economy of conflicts in a more holistic manner is crucial to finding potential remedies to situations of conflict and the related crimes around the world.

In the same vein, the world must find solutions to the thriving market in small arms and light weapons. Terrorist, militant and rebel groups continue to have access to weapons that are used to wreak havoc on communities in attempts to gain political power or push forward their selfish and unpatriotic agendas.

Nigeria is firmly committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and recognizes the primary responsibility of States in protecting civilians within

their national jurisdictions. That conviction underlies our resolve to continue to take all the necessary measures, in full compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, to protect civilians in the battle against the terrorist group Boko Haram and its ilk.

Nigeria has had its fair share of extreme terrorist activities by Boko Haram in the north-east region of the country, which have led to huge displacement of people and conflict-related violence against civilians, including women and children, that has been widely condemned. Since the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force, made up of Nigeria, Chad, Benin, the Niger and Cameroon, resounding successes have been recorded in the degradation and decimation of the group. Nigeria is collaborating with the United Nations and other international partners to improve service delivery and enhance protection measures, both in communities and in areas where civilians seek refuge.

In furtherance of that, Nigeria has appointed a national focal point on the responsibility to protect under the presidential committee on small arms and light weapons to tackle the issue of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. A human rights desk has also been established by the Nigerian military to ensure that the military operates in accordance with its rules of engagement. The Government has taken measures to enhance the security of civilians, including women and children in the camps for internally displaced persons, to reduce their vulnerability and promote their safe return to their homes and their reintegration into society.

Nigeria is a signatory to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It has put in motion legal remedies for victims of Boko Haram terrorism, which have resulted in diligent prosecution of many detained Boko Haram terrorists in competent courts of law, as well as in reintegration, reorientation and rehabilitation programmes designed to meet the specificities of each victim of violence.

We have also intensified efforts to demine and remove improvised explosive devices, facilitate military escort of humanitarian workers and aid, grant access to detention facilities, release detainees after screening and profiling and conducting medical outreach to remote communities. Furthermore, the military's code of conduct and rules of engagement have been revised to address the new trend of violent extremism and the protection of human rights.

The federal Government set up an independent judicial commission in 2017 to look into human rights abuses by military personnel in the country. Its mandate is, among other things, to scrutinize compliance by the armed forces with human rights obligations and rules of engagement, especially in local conflict and insurgency situations; to investigate alleged violations by the Nigerian security agencies of international humanitarian law and human rights law, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1999, as amended, the Geneva Convention Act, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other relevant laws; and to look into factors that might be hindering the quick resolution of local conflict and proffer solutions on how to prevent human rights violation in times of conflict in future.

In addition, Nigeria has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, thereby committing to implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Following the endorsement, the Nigerian Government launched the Safe Schools Initiative, aimed at providing education and piloting safe education facilities in the conflict-affected areas of the north-east.

As part of efforts to counter violent extremism, Nigeria is taking steps to deradicalize convicted terrorists through the deployment of emergency teams of psychosocial counsellors and health professionals to the north-east to assist with the profiling of victims for appropriate therapies. Furthermore, we are utilizing

Islamic scholars to counter extremist narratives by training them on various aspects of dialogue and religious counselling. We are also working assiduously with the affected communities to design economic revitalization programmes targeted at those most affected by terrorism and violent extremism.

Recognizing that our efforts will be more productive with international support, we call for the full implementation of the provisions of resolution 2349 (2017) and for our international partners — technical and financial alike — to remain unwavering in their support. Protecting civilians in conflict situations remains a critical challenge, not only for the United Nations but also for the entire international community. We pay tribute to our security forces, peacekeepers, humanitarian workers, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders for their hard work, often in difficult circumstances, to ensure the safety and security of civilians.

Annex 52**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations**

This statement is issued on behalf of the Nordic countries — Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2020/366), and Estonia for convening this open debate. Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and ensuring accountability for violations must, regrettably, continue to be of great concern to the Council.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic calls for solidarity. The Nordic countries support the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. Gender equality and women's rights are essential to getting through the pandemic together.

The Nordic countries remain deeply troubled by the inadequate respect for international humanitarian law, international human rights law and humanitarian principles shown by parties to conflicts around the world. Not only do violations during armed conflict have immediate negative impacts on individuals and their communities, they also undermine longer-term prospects for reconciliation, reintegration, development and sustainable peace.

We welcome the practical measures and steps to increase the protection of civilians in armed conflict presented in the Secretary-General's report. We also find the resolution adopted at the thirty-third International Conference of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in December a very useful tool for all States to ensure the implementation of international humanitarian law.

We must continue to fight impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. First, it is necessary to support national efforts to strengthen States' own capacity to ensure justice in the wake of armed conflict. Secondly, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other global and regional mechanisms are important tools in ensuring accountability. For instance, we have seen how the ICC has issued important convictions for crimes related to rape and sexual violence in armed conflict. We also welcome the recent decision to include in the ICC Statute the war crime of intentional use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, including in non-international armed conflicts. We call upon all States parties to ratify or accept the amendment as soon as possible.

The obligation for States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Convention on Cluster Munitions to clear contaminated areas and destroy stockpiles are concrete and efficient contributions to the protection of civilians after conflict. We are deeply troubled about the effects that the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas have had on the civilian population in many conflicts. We therefore support the development of a political declaration aimed at enhancing the protection of civilians in urban warfare.

We need to increase the United Nations capacity to prevent and resolve conflicts. We will continue to strengthen the United Nations mediation efforts and to support its broader political and peacebuilding efforts. United Nations peacekeeping and political missions must have the protection of civilians firmly embedded in their mandates and operationalized on the ground as a mission-wide responsibility, ranging from preventive measures to institutional reform and direct physical protection. This year, as we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), we renew our commitment to the women and peace and security agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates protection risks for people in conflict zones. Both the Secretary-General's report and the ICRC underline how respect for international humanitarian law is key to ensuring essential services and the legal protection necessary to tackle the crisis. The attacks on health care must end. We call for the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). We support the efforts of the ICRC and the World Health Organization, in particular to identify best practices to protect health care and document attacks. It is paramount that humanitarian organizations get safe, timely and unhindered access to populations in need everywhere. We need to ensure that sanctions and other restrictive measures, including national COVID-related restrictions, do not hinder the delivery of life-saving assistance. We urge the Security Council to renew resolution 2504 (2020) to ensure that people in need have access to humanitarian assistance and protection throughout the whole of Syria.

Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is widespread and devastating. We support the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and call for the implementation of resolution 2467 (2019), with a focus on justice, accountability and a survivor-centred approach in the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence. At the conference on sexual and gender-based violence held in Oslo last year, an increase in both funding and action was pledged. We urge all States and organizations to follow through on their commitments.

Armed conflicts have a disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities. We therefore emphasize the particular needs of persons with disabilities in humanitarian responses. Member States should take all the appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination and marginalization of persons based on disability in situations of armed conflict.

Children are particularly vulnerable in conflicts, and we support the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Secretary-General's report points to the Safe Schools Declaration as a concrete protection tool and calls on all States to endorse and implement it. As we mark the fifth anniversary of the Declaration, we are encouraged that 104 States have endorsed it, the most recent being the current President of the Security Council, Estonia, and Antigua and Barbuda. We are very pleased to see that endorsing States, international organizations and civil society, led by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, demonstrate commitment to its implementation. We thank the Secretary-General for highlighting the fate of the missing and their families and the need for increased efforts to restore family links. We welcome the resolution at the International Conference of the International Committee of the Red Cross on restoring family links and data protection.

Armed conflicts also have significant negative consequences for the environment and the livelihoods of civilian populations in conflict-affected areas. The Nordic countries welcome the increased attention to the environmental impacts of armed conflict, as well as the initiatives to strengthen the legal protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts.

Dialogue with parties to conflict is key to enhancing the protection of civilians. The work done by influential States is important — leading by example is crucial. We would also like to highlight the work done during conflicts by the ICRC, Geneva Call and others to engage armed forces and non-State armed groups in changing their practices, understanding their obligations and acting accordingly.

To conclude, we would like to give recognition to the practitioners, humanitarian organizations and civil society members that have taken the lead in some of the most successful practical initiatives and measures taken to increase compliance and protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Annex 53**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations**

We thank the Permanent Mission of Estonia for holding this very important high-level open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict via video-teleconference. The theme underscores the pivotal importance of the issue, especially as civilians around the globe have become a disproportionate target of violence in the ongoing situations of armed conflict. We also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of Red Cross and the other briefers for their insightful statements.

The modern edifice of international humanitarian law is built on the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Today the four Geneva Conventions are among the very few international treaties to have been universally ratified, reflecting not just the universal legal consensus but also our shared values of ethical behaviour during armed conflict and the conduct of hostilities.

Despite the comprehensive legal framework, it is quite evident that the implementation of international humanitarian law, particularly the protection of civilians during armed conflict, has not matched our expectations. That is also reflected in the Secretary General's latest report (S/2020/366), which notes that tens of thousands of civilians were killed, maimed or injured in 2019 in various armed conflicts around the globe. Unfortunately, the cardinal principles of distinguishing between civilians and combatants, military necessity and proportionality continue to be violated, with warring parties operating with impunity. It is the persistent failure to comply with those obligations and respect the rules of international humanitarian law during armed conflict that remain the abiding challenges for the international community.

The empirical evidence of recent and older history shows that systematic and consistent violations of the rights of civilians are most frequent and pervasive in situations of foreign occupation and suppression of the right of peoples to self-determination. An important question that should be posed is how to protect civilian populations when their very suppression is the object of the conflict. The rationale of suppressing terrorism should not open the door to the repression of civilians seeking respect for their fundamental rights, including the right to self-determination.

The challenge of addressing gross violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law are exacerbated by the problem of inequity in the international response. In some situations, there is a quick and even robust response. In others, the perpetrators enjoy virtual impunity, both at the national and international levels. Most often, there is sufficient public concern but insufficient political will to act. The record of the Security Council itself in that context is not without blemish. In the circumstances, it is vital to reinforce the concept of the protection of civilians in all such situations of complex crisis.

We agree with the Secretary-General's assessment that the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further exacerbated difficulties in the protection of civilians. Since the attention of Governments and the international community is absorbed by the unprecedented health crisis, the pandemic has allowed some States to take advantage of the situation by intensifying targeted violence against civilians, particularly those living under foreign occupation.

In that regard, we wish to draw the Security Council's attention to the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, where India has callously exploited the COVID-19 crisis to enhance its

control of the occupied territory. Already reeling from a nine-month-long draconian digital and physical lockdown, the occupied valley has now been placed under a double lockdown in the guise of COVID-19 restrictions, severely impeding the access of Kashmiris to medicine, medical help and information on ways to deal with the pandemic.

While the world's attention has been riveted to combating the COVID-19 virus, India has taken further steps, almost by stealth, to change the demography of occupied Jammu and Kashmir by promulgating new domicile regulations that would enable settlers from all over India to colonize the occupied state in violation of Security Council resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In order to suppress the legitimate resistance of the people of Jammu and Kashmir advocating for self-determination, the Indian security forces have once again resorted to the indiscriminate use of pellet guns and live ammunition, arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings against civilians in the occupied valley. In April 2020 alone, 33 Kashmiris were killed, 152 injured and 945 arbitrarily arrested. In another inhumane practice, the Indian security forces have refused to return the bodies of killed Kashmiris to their families for proper burial.

Defying the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, India has intensified its violations of the ceasefire along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir and the working boundary. Since 1 January, it has committed 989 unprovoked ceasefire violations and deliberately targeted innocent civilians on the Pakistan side of the Line of Control, killing six civilians and injuring 82. In flagrant violation of article 28 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, India has frequently placed its artillery guns within crowded Kashmiri villages, using them as human shields, to avoid Pakistani retaliation for its ceasefire violations.

The worsening situation and increased attacks against civilians call for the Security Council's intervention by holding India accountable for its clear, grave breaches of international humanitarian law and war crimes in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

The protection of civilians in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations has been complex because of the vastly different nature of armed conflicts, possible contradiction of the long-standing agreed principles of United Nations peacekeeping, the limitations of the mandates and the serious inadequacy of the resources made available for peacekeeping missions.

Pakistan, as one of the world's top troop-contributing countries, has proudly and conscientiously undertaken the task of proactively protecting civilians, in collaboration with the host Governments, as and when mandated by the Security Council.

While the fundamental principles of peacekeeping are not an impediment to the protection-of-civilian mandates, the primary responsibility for the protection of all civilians nevertheless rests with the host countries. The clear distinction between the established norm of the protection of civilians and the evolving concept of the responsibility to protect must therefore be maintained.

The goal of protecting civilians is best served by preventing the outbreak of armed conflicts in the first place. The Security Council, as the primary organ of the United Nations tasked with maintaining international peace and security, should focus on the root causes of emerging and long-standing conflicts, including Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir, and find inclusive political solutions. Inaction by the Council in cases of foreign aggression and occupation comes at a high human

cost. However, unfortunately, we continue to see legal and moral values sacrificed at the altar of political expediency.

In conclusion, collective action and multilateral solutions to today's conflicts offer the best hope for millions of civilians who are trapped between death and despair. We must not fail in responding to this challenge. We must act boldly in all situations where the survival of millions of civilians caught in the vice of violence and war is threatened.

Annex 54

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

We would like to thank the Estonian presidency for convening this open debate on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which is also a priority for Peru. We particularly welcome the participation of the President of Estonia, Her Excellency Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid. We would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his important presentation, as well as Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Peace Laureate.

Peru is a country that is committed to multilateralism and the rule of law as fundamental tenets of the international community. Within the rule of law, two bodies of law are key: international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We are party to the core international instruments in both areas, and their provisions are duly reflected, developed and implemented in our national legislation.

During our recent membership of the Security Council, we attached high priority to the Council's responsibility to protect civilians, in line with the obligations established under international humanitarian law. We believe that the Council has a moral and legal obligation to act as one to put an end to the suffering of millions of people in the many situations on its agenda, including those who are particularly vulnerable — children, young people, the elderly and persons with disabilities, among others.

The international community must respect and comply with the principles of international humanitarian law, including the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives, and the principle of proportionality, among others. This is a collective legal obligation, as the International Court of Justice specified in its 1996 advisory opinion on the *Legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons*, in which it set out that

“these fundamental rules are to be observed by all States whether or not they have ratified the conventions that contain them, because they constitute intransgressible principles of international customary law” (*A/51/218, annex, para. 79*).

States have the primary responsibility to respect and ensure the human rights of all persons within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction. Similarly, it is the obligation of all parties to armed conflict to take measures to protect civilians. This is in accordance with international law, as affirmed on several occasions by the Security Council.

In that regard, Peru adheres to the concept of the responsibility to protect. This year marks 15 years since the concept was unanimously agreed and adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 60/1, thereby establishing the responsibility of each State to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

In that connection, we wish to emphasize that 119 States, including Peru, have endorsed the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct, which commits us to acting in a timely and decisive manner to prevent and put an end to crimes of atrocity.

We stress that the various peacekeeping operations deployed as a result of a Council resolution are mandated to protect civilians, including from the actions of their own Government's regular army.

We note with great concern that the latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) points out that, for the ninth consecutive year, the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas is devastating for civilians, who have long been the most affected by these devices, which violate the principles of distinction and proportionality prescribed by international humanitarian law. In that regard, and in the light of the recommendation of the Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peru fully supports the process leading to the negotiation and adoption of an international political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

We should bear in mind that we must achieve the goal of a world free of poverty and hunger in order to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the vision of a world without poverty and hunger, with equitable and widespread access to quality education, health care and social protection, thereby fulfilling the rights to an adequate standard of living, education and health, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We must therefore act decisively so as to comply with the obligations of international humanitarian law and develop effective measures to prevent violations in order to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure during armed conflict, since that, in turn, leads to forced displacement and the economic exclusion of victims.

The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is particularly important in situations such as the current one, where the coronavirus disease pandemic is affecting all humankind through its rapid spread and where vulnerable and marginalized groups are more exposed to the disease and its repercussions in other areas. This reality is affecting millions of people, the vast majority of whom are civilians, for whom, in addition to suffering armed conflict, there is the impact of a disease that is making the highest demands on all our health systems. It is a disease that now more than ever needs civilian infrastructure — particularly for health care and the production and distribution of medicines and food — which must therefore be protected. For that reason, Peru firmly supports the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to help contain the coronavirus disease.

We note with great concern the persistence of sexual violence related to armed conflict, of which, as the Secretary-General's report mentions, women and girls continue to represent the vast majority of victims. We reiterate our condemnation, in the strongest terms, of all forms of sexual violence in armed conflict, as well as the urgent need to protect victims and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

Meanwhile, we believe that the care and rehabilitation of victims is fundamental to any sustainable peacebuilding process, which must take into account the fact that the psychological impacts of conflicts, particularly on civilians, have the potential to destroy the social fabric of communities, thereby making them more likely to suffer new conflicts.

We believe that it is important to take into account the needs and concerns of affected communities in order to enhance their protection. Their involvement in conflict prevention gives greater credibility to negotiation and peacebuilding processes. In that context, we highlight the role that young people and women are called upon to play in conflict prevention and resolution, justice and reconciliation. Both are crucial to building the inclusive vision of the future required to achieve sustainable peace.

It is equally critical to ensure accountability for the commission of atrocity crimes. The universalization of international criminal jurisdiction will make it possible to prevent the suffering of civilians in conflicts more effectively.

In conclusion, we would like to pay tribute to the humanitarian agencies and workers, as well as the Blue Helmets, involved in protecting civilians in conflict areas under the most difficult conditions, risking their lives to save others.

Annex 55**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Philippines to the United Nations, Kira Christianne D. Azucena**

We commend Estonia, under its presidency of the Security Council, for today's open high-level video-teleconference in the face of the extraordinary circumstances brought about by the coronavirus disease pandemic.

The protection of civilians continues to be front and centre in the dialogue on peacekeeping operations. It is more than 20 years since an explicit mandate on the protection of civilians was established for the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone. Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for a culture of protection to permeate the United Nations system and the mindsets of those in the field. In 2015, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, which we now know as the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support, respectively, defined the protection of civilians around three tiers of protection: protection through dialogue and engagement, the provision of physical protection and establishment of a protective environment.

In theory and practice, the protection of civilians has become a priority in nine United Nations peacekeeping missions where 95 per cent of peacekeepers are deployed. Nonetheless, the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate is beset by three key challenges. First, missions tend to implement the protection of civilians in a process-oriented way or based on activities; secondly, there is a disconnect between the protection of civilians and political strategy; and, thirdly, how to apply a whole-of-mission strategy — political, military/police and civilian — in order to pursue a protection of civilians mandate.

As it should be, the mandate on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping, with an emphasis on the protection of children and combating sexual exploitation and abuse, is the standard by which the performance of United Nations peacekeeping is measured, giving it legitimacy and credibility. The Philippines earnestly subscribes to this view, and therefore strongly supports Security Council and General Assembly resolutions that underscore the principal concern of conflict prevention and the protection of civilians in areas of conflict.

The Philippines submits the following views on the elements that make up the mandate of protecting civilians in armed conflict.

First, comprehensive predeployment training forms the bedrock of effective peacekeeping operations. It should draw on existing policy, guidance and training resources to explain what the protection of civilians means in a given operational context, or mission theatre, defining the responsibilities, opportunities and constraints faced by peacekeepers deployed in that context. Drawing on its experience as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Philippines supports the hosting of centres of excellence per region to deliver training packages to troop- and police-contributing countries consistent with United Nations standards.

Secondly, the Philippines encourages the deployment of more women in United Nations peacekeeping operations, including in leadership positions. The Philippines has an all-female civilian-relations company from the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, which assists with the rehabilitation and recovery of internally displaced persons (IDPs) of the Marawi crisis. The company complements peacekeeping operations by helping IDPs, conducting peace education and providing psychosocial debriefing among the traumatized, particularly women, children and young people.

Thirdly, the Philippines supports the Vancouver Principles, especially the prevention of child recruitment in conflict areas. We commend the Security Council for establishing a framework to address the protection of children in armed conflict and the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence. Last year, His Excellency President Rodrigo Roa Duterte signed into law the Special Protection of Children in Armed Conflict Act, which declares children as zones of peace and criminalizes grave violations against children and attacks on schools, child development or day-care centres, playgrounds and recreation parks.

Finally, the Philippines calls on the Secretary-General and Member States to promote unarmed strategies or unarmed civilian protection as a key complement to the protection of civilians toolkit. We are pleased to note that the 2020 report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations recommends “leveraging unarmed practices and capabilities of local communities to support the creation of a protective environment” (*A/74/19, para. 132*).

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process of the Philippines acknowledges civil society’s role as a partner in bringing peace to Mindanao. I mention, as examples, Ceasefire Watch, Spaces for Peace, Mothers for Peace, Tiyakap Kalilintad, or Care for Peace, and the International Monitoring Team (IMT). The IMT is a civilian-based ceasefire monitoring and response mechanism and is a model for other countries in conflict. Grassroots leaders from ASEAN members and some from Eastern European countries have travelled to Mindanao to learn more about how it works on the ground. In 2009, the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front agreed to expand the mandate of the IMT to include civilian protection.

The Philippines believes that an effective protection-of-civilians mandate must be anchored in human rights and international humanitarian law, particularly with regard to vulnerable groups, and should adhere to the principles of accountability, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding.

Annex 56**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Poland to the United Nations**

As the protection of civilians worldwide remains the highest priority for Poland, we would like to begin by thanking Estonia for providing, despite current restrictions, this opportunity to exchange views on the situation of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to extend Poland's appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Peter Maurer and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for their briefings during this open high-level video-teleconference of the Security Council.

While we align ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts, Poland would like, in its national capacity, to welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) and share our most recent experience of membership in the Security Council.

The report acknowledges that more than 20,000 civilians were killed or injured as a result of attacks in only 10 ongoing conflicts, which raises the highest alarm for Poland. Equally disconcerting is the urbanization of conflict, the inhumane impact of improvised explosive devices, the unlawful denial of humanitarian access, attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel, hospitals and other facilities, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, counter-terrorism measures that impede humanitarian action, and sexual and gender-based violence. Attacks on journalists and human rights defenders are yet another example of flagrant violations of the existing normative framework.

Those few examples alone should be enough to incentivize the international community to step up its efforts to protect civilians, given how disturbing this comprehensive overview is. The already dire situation for civilians in conflict-affected areas is being further impacted by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. It is taking a toll among refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, the young and the elderly, men and women and persons with disabilities, among so many others. For the purpose of this statement, however, we will focus on the situation of persons in the most vulnerable situations — persons with disabilities, women and children, refugees — as well as such crucial issues for the agenda as emerging threats, accountability and peacekeeping.

To protect persons in the most vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, Poland joined the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire so that fighting parties stop hostilities, which only aggravate the suffering of civilians. Simultaneously, Poland would like to recall that States have a primary obligation to protect civilians, including during major health crises, and that COVID-19-related precautionary measures introduced by States should not be used as a pretext to disregard their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Yet armed conflict and current crises continue to have significant impact on persons with disabilities. The wide range of challenges includes, among many other things, violence and a lack of access to health-care services, education and employment opportunities. Almost a year after the adoption of the resolution 2475 (2019), presented by Poland and the United Kingdom, the detrimental impact of conflict on persons with disabilities persists. Organizations working on disability inclusion in Yemen face constraints while providing crucial services, due to bureaucratic delays and cuts in funding. Persons with disabilities facing life-threatening situations have limited access to escape and often live in deplorable conditions. Resolution 2475 (2019) was meant to be an important step in changing

that. But, in order to see tangible effects on the ground, it must be fully implemented, also by including persons with disabilities in decision-making processes.

Women and children continue to face obstacles regarding health care, livelihood, education and other critical support. Bearing in mind imminent risks caused by armed conflicts for women and girls, in particular under the special circumstances caused by COVID-19, Poland would like to underline the importance of initiatives aimed at the effective implementation of the women and peace and security agenda as well as prevention and response efforts on the fight against sexual, gender-based and domestic violence.

Moreover, Poland is especially concerned about the increased attacks on educational facilities, students and teachers. We welcome and support initiatives aimed at putting an end to the use of schools and universities for military purposes. The 2014 Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict are a good example in this regard. To confirm our commitment to the effective implementation of those Guidelines, Poland signed the Safe School Declaration. We believe that such initiatives constitute an important step towards the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, especially in conflict situations. It is especially important as children in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and many other countries are being forced to fight on the front lines and exposed to killing, maiming and sexual violence. Given the gravity of this situation, the Warsaw Process Humanitarian Issues and Refugees Working Group, which convened in February in Brasilia, focused on ways to foster political solutions and improve coordination and structural interventions to reduce the impact of humanitarian crises in the Middle East on children and young people.

In addition, the refugee and forced displacement crises are among most pressing issues to be addressed by the international community. The number of displaced people worldwide reached almost 71 million in 2019, with 2 million displaced in Syria and Libya alone. Those figures continue to grow, and the situation is deteriorating further due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The protection persons in the most vulnerable situations remains the priority for Polish development cooperation. Although Poland is a relatively new donor of development assistance, including humanitarian aid, we have already managed to develop areas in which we can share our knowledge and experience — for example, the protection in conflict of persons with disabilities and of other groups at risk of exclusion.

Polish Aid is also involved in development activities aimed at providing psychological support for children affected by the conflict in Ukraine. Together with Polish Humanitarian Action, we work to improve the functioning of social-service systems by developing the capacities of social and psychological services personnel in the settlements along the contact line. Ukrainian civilians on the contact line continue to face direct physical threats to their security as a result of daily shelling, small arms fire and mine and unexploded ordnance contamination. For many, this remains the primary threat to their safety, particularly in the light of increased ceasefire violations. Parties to the conflict should continue to exercise restraint in the use of force and abide by international humanitarian and human rights norms and principles.

Let me turn to emerging threats and accountability. The international community should diligently address humanitarian challenges in the protection of civilians, such as the inhumane impact of improvised explosive devices, and curb illicit flows of small arms and weapons. Last year, according to the report of the Secretary-General, in Afghanistan alone more than 10,000 civilians were killed or

injured as a result of the use of improvised explosive devices. The situation is no better in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan or Somalia. Conflict also continues to have a negative impact in other domains, including the environment, which results in further negative consequences for human health, inflicting serious health problems and reducing access to resources vital for survival.

In all those cases, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law continue to apply, and must be respected by all parties and actors, in order to ensure effective protection for conflict-affected countries. Poland believes that respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be enhanced. We strongly call on all States and non-State parties to conflict to comply with their legal obligations. And, since international legal norms are just as applicable online as they are offline, we call on States also to adhere to the existing legal framework in cyberspace.

Impunity for any violation of international humanitarian law should be put to an end. We need to ensure accountability regardless of the perpetrator. The International Criminal Court (ICC) should play the leading role on the international stage in terms of accountability and restoring a sense of justice. We believe that the Security Council should promote accountability by more frequently referring to the ICC cases involving the most serious international crimes.

At the same time, we would like to emphasize the crucial role played by peacekeeping when it comes to the protection of civilians. Deployed in evolving security contexts, peacekeeping operations are at times the basic security guarantee for civilians. The protection of civilians remains a high priority issue for Poland, which is why we have acceded to the Kigali Principles and why we call on Member States, including all troop- and police-contributing countries, to endorse them.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that the protection of civilians is not an exclusively humanitarian task, but requires a comprehensive approach with adequate political support and actions to be taken in peacekeeping, human rights, the rule of law, political, security, development and disarmament domains. As the challenge is global, we should promote cooperation and partnership among States, international and non-governmental organizations, but also other stakeholders. These actions should be supported by the heightened diplomacy, awareness-raising and necessary training. For these reasons, Poland has been advocating and facilitating communication with State and non-State actors, and encourages others to do the same.

Annex 57**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani**

At the outset, I would like to thank the Estonian presidency for convening this open debate. We thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for their briefings.

The grave and systematic targeting of civilians in armed conflict that the world has witnessed proves the need for adherence to international humanitarian law enshrined in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Protocols Additional, and other relevant international instruments. The breaches of international humanitarian law are an infringement on human values and a violation of the international covenants that have been agreed upon by the world, notably the Charter of the United Nations.

At a time when the world is facing an unprecedented global health crisis due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we need to be reminded that more than 70 million people have been forcibly displaced by armed conflict and are now more vulnerable to the threat of the pandemic. Immediate action by the international community is therefore needed to protect civilians exposed to the risks of COVID-19. In the same vein, it is critical that all parties to armed conflicts seriously respond to the appeal launched on 25 March by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire.

The Security Council has underlined the importance of conflict prevention in the context of a commitment to collective action in order to spare peoples around the world the suffering and devastation caused by conflicts, and towards the promotion of international peace and security. It is regrettable, however, that such an approach has not been pursued in many situations, including when it comes to the unjust and unlawful blockade against the State of Qatar, which will enter its fourth year on 5 June. This blockade is imposed under false and untenable pretexts, with total disregard for the disastrous consequences on the security and stability of our region, at a time when the Arab region is going through numerous crises and conflicts causing a tremendous amount of suffering. Instead of seeking to contribute to solving and settling those crises and their root causes, the blockading countries have chosen a path that violates the provisions of international law and runs counter to the desired intentions of the international community.

The State of Qatar is proud of its strong partnership with the United Nations system to improve its capacity to quickly respond to the millions of civilians in need in armed conflict. Besides our multi-year unearmarked contributions to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the State of Qatar is also an active member of the OCHA Donors Support Group and will assume the presidency of the Group in July. We have also supported OCHA country-based pooled funds since 2016 by providing unearmarked and rapid financing to close the funding gaps, including by providing support to humanitarian efforts in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Nigeria.

In line with the State of Qatar's intention to support the International Committee of the Red Cross, a joint declaration of intent was signed — the first of its kind in the region — to support civilians affected by armed conflict, thereby contributing to promoting respect for international humanitarian law.

Within the framework of shared responsibility and international cooperation to face the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we would also like to note the cooperation between the State of Qatar and NATO in support of the Secretary-General's call to address the humanitarian impact of the pandemic. The State of Qatar has supported OCHA's global appeal to provide support for the transport of

humanitarian and medical supplies by air through NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre.

In conclusion, the State of Qatar is proud to co-chair, alongside Denmark and Costa Rica, the cross-regional Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect. On the fifteenth anniversary of the enshrinement of this landmark principle in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1) we continue to seek to ensure that the international community never again fails to halt the mass atrocity crimes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Annex 58**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Cho Hyun**

My delegation commends the President for convening today's timely open video-teleconference of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Republic of Korea expresses its deep appreciation to Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of Estonia, for her participation today. My delegation also thanks Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, member of The Elders, for their enlightening briefings.

Over the past 20 years since the inclusion, in 1999, of the protection of civilians as an item on the Security Council's agenda, we have witnessed steady progress on this very important issue. However, the reality on the ground is still far from ideal. We continue to witness the horrific suffering of innocent people in many parts of the world. Scores of civilians are being killed, maimed, starved and displaced on a daily basis. Hospitals and schools are being targeted. Economic and social infrastructure is being ravaged. Such tragic events have lingering impacts beyond the current generation, thereby hampering the normal trajectory of societal progress. Furthermore, as the report of the Secretary-General this month (S/2020/366) rightly points out, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic could exacerbate untold suffering for the most vulnerable populations already in difficult situations.

Against this troubling backdrop, my delegation would like to emphasize the following five points with a view to enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, the Republic of Korea urges all parties to conflict to support the Secretary-General's timely appeal for an immediate global ceasefire to collectively tackle the COVID-19 crisis. The entire global population is now facing a common threat, and we must work together to minimize the pandemic's impact on all. In this regard, my delegation very much hopes that the Security Council can unite to come up with substantive measures to support the Secretary-General's urgent appeal for an immediate global ceasefire.

Secondly, in protecting civilians in armed conflict we must pay greater attention to the disproportionate impact conflict has on vulnerable groups. Sadly, in so many conflicts around the world, time and again we witness rampant sexual and gender-based violence, the systemic marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities and other deplorably hateful targeting. The Council has been steadily expanding protection for such groups, including women, children, people with disabilities and others, through a series of resolutions. We should continue to work harder to strengthen the requisite protection.

Thirdly, in order to achieve sustainable peace and security, more must be done to address the root causes of conflict through a comprehensive approach to the peace-development-human rights nexus. While Governments bear the primary responsibility for protecting their own citizens, greater support from the international community to ensure the safety and human rights of those affected by conflict should go hand in hand. Prevention and sustaining peace were at the heart of the Republic of Korea's efforts as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2017 and 2018, and we are consistently increasing our financial contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme to realize this vision.

Fourthly, my delegation urges all parties to respect and fully comply with the guiding rules and principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In that connection, it is important that we all strive to reduce the continued and troubling gap between the existing normative framework that we have accomplished on the one hand and the stark reality of undercompliance and, in some cases, impunity on the ground on the other. The international criminal tribunals have been playing a critical role in reducing that gap by ensuring that there is no safe haven for perpetrators of major crimes under international law. The precedents of accountability must be accumulated in order to secure viable and critical pathways to truth and justice for appalling crimes against civilians in armed conflict, thereby stamping out impunity.

Fifthly, we would like to highlight the importance of incorporating the latest technological developments into the work of the United Nations to improve engagement with the vulnerable populations in the post-COVID-19 era, to enhance the effectiveness of peace operations and to protect civilians in armed conflict as we look forward to hosting the 2021 Peacekeeping Ministerial meeting. Peacekeeping operations should be equipped with the best available resources and equipment to facilitate the effective implementation of their respective mandates, including the protection of civilians. For example, new technologies in data collection, digital early warning, and information and communications can be leveraged to help protect civilians, expedite humanitarian assistance and secure accountability. In that regard, we welcome and support the United Nations initiative to establish the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in United Nations Peacekeeping. Bearing in mind the double-edged characteristics of technology, we must maximize the many positive aspects of new technology while minimizing its negative impacts.

The Republic of Korea would like to reaffirm its driving commitment to working with the United Nations as well as all Member States with a view to better protecting civilians in armed conflict today, tomorrow and beyond.

Annex 59**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations, Ion Jinga**

I would like to commend the Estonian presidency for having convened this meeting on the protection of civilians, a topic that lies at the heart of the Security Council's mandate. Allow me also to express my deep appreciation for the informative briefings given by Secretary-General António Guterres; the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer; and by Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Romania aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. I will now make a few remarks in my national capacity.

This year's debate on the protection of civilians is taking place in a particularly challenging context, namely, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is a stress test for the United Nations system as a whole and which poses a particular challenge as regards the protection-of-civilians mandate. The current crisis has the potential to place at higher risk the already vulnerable populations that are suffering in conflict-affected areas: the elderly, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, as well as women and children.

In 2019, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which formally recognized the protection of civilians as a matter of international peace and security. Since then, the Council has adopted multiple resolutions on this topic, enacted a legal framework for strengthening it and mandated peacekeepers to integrate the protection of civilians into their missions. Those developments offered glimpses of hope for an improvement in the safety and security of the millions of people affected by war and violence.

However, in spite of this robust normative framework, implementation gaps remain. The latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) describes 2019 as a year of suffering. We continue to witness, on a regular basis, attacks on civilian objects such as schools, religious sites, immigration facilities, markets and towns, as well as widespread and persistent humanitarian access constraints and the perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence. According to the Secretary-General's report, more than 20,000 civilians were killed or injured in 2019 as a result of attacks in 10 countries only: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen. Those numbers are appalling.

We continue to believe that those gaps can be addressed, first and foremost through prevention, which remains the most important tool that we have at our disposal for the protection of civilians. It can comprise advancing political dialogue, pursuing reconciliation processes and strengthening security sectors, as well as economic recovery and social development.

Secondly, when prevention has failed, ensuring respect for international humanitarian and human rights law is the guarantor that even in the face of war human dignity is still upheld and parties may find ways to coexist once hostilities have ended. That should be even more stringent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic by guaranteeing protection to health-care workers, facilities and transport.

In implementing our commitments, Romania is among the States that have adopted a strategy on the implementation of international humanitarian law, which contains clear regulations on the protection of civilians. The strategy is designed to be implemented both at the domestic level and during participation in international

missions. At the international level, Romania has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration; the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, and the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups; the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers; the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians; and resolution 2286 (2016), concerning the protection of the wounded and sick and of medical and humanitarian personnel engaged in medical duties.

Thirdly, concerning the fight to end impunity, we recognize the primary responsibility of States to promote and ensure accountability and, at the same time, we remain convinced of the promise embodied by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to address the impunity gap for the most serious crimes. Romania continues to encourage the widest possible participation in the Rome Statute and reiterates its support for the Court and its calls for enhanced cooperation with the ICC. Closing an important gap in the Court's jurisdiction, in December 2019 the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute adopted an amendment to the Statute to include the war crime of intentionally using the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in non-international armed conflicts. Romania was a co-sponsor of the amendment.

Romania has been a solid contributor to peacekeeping operations for more than 29 years, deploying in that period approximately 13,000 military staff, police officers and close-protection units. Romania upholds its responsibilities in offering well-prepared and trained officers. In doing so, we organize — prior to the deployment of contingents under the United Nations flag — a rigorous three-month training programme in which the protection of civilians and respect for human rights are central themes. We have also placed particular emphasis on incorporating a gender perspective across operations.

In line with the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative, the Ministry of National Defence has made a substantial contribution in the past year to fulfilling Romania's commitments, deploying in Mali, between October 2019 and October 2020, a detachment of helicopters for medical evacuation and transport operations in support of the Malian armed forces. Currently, the Romanian military and police officers are deployed in four United Nations missions with a mandate to protect civilians — the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. The culture of protection has been instilled in the mindset of our peacekeepers within the process of pre-deployment training and also in the field. Our uniformed officers are involved in all three tiers of the protection of civilians: first, protection through dialogue and engagement; secondly, the provision of physical protection; and, thirdly, the establishment of a protective environment.

Romania supports the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report and will continue to advocate and act for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, in close collaboration with all relevant actors.

Annex 60

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations, Valentine Rugwabiza

I congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I thank you for having convened this meaningful discussion on peacekeeping with a particular focus on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

As a top troop- and police-contributing country, Rwanda considers this topic to be of critical importance in our collective effort to lend support in the implementation of the Security Council mandates on the protection of civilians. I join others in assuring the Council of my delegation's full support in this endeavour.

This debate comes at a time when Member States are facing an unprecedented global health crisis in the form of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Host nations of peacekeeping operations have not been spared either, which may affect the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the needy. Even amid COVID-19, our troops and police have maintained the tempo of operation while implementing protection-of-civilians mandates.

Saving the lives of innocent civilians needs to be a primary responsibility of peacekeeping missions with protection-of-civilians mandates. The peace process is for the people, mainly civilians, in particular women and children, who are the most vulnerable to violence during armed conflicts. The failure to protect civilians from armed violence and atrocities, including sexual exploitation and abuse, during conflict defeats the purpose of peace undertakings.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366) notes that following the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) and subsequent protection-specific resolutions, the Security Council enhanced the protection framework for civilians in armed conflict, which has saved the lives of many innocent people. However, the report also points to the fact that a lot remains to be done to strengthen the protection of civilians, including humanitarian personnel.

We must acknowledge that the Geneva Convention and related Protocols have not been observed, hence the lack of ability to provide the desired protection to civilians in armed conflict, as armed groups have consistently violated their protection-of-civilians obligations. In addition, protection of civilians mandates have not done enough to prevent killings, sexual and gender-based abuse or restrictions in the flow of humanitarian aid. In that vein, we wish to emphasize the following points.

States Members of the United Nations and the Secretariat, in partnership with host nations, the African Union and other regional organizations, need to collectively strengthen compliance with international law as an essential legal instrument for the protection of civilians. Most civilian deaths, suffering and displacement could be avoided if parties to conflict consistently respected and diligently upheld the Geneva Convention and its Protocols.

Peacekeeping operations are being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including through restrictions on movement and peacekeeper rotations. Six of 13 current United Nations peace operations have the protection of civilians at the core of their mandates. Emerging challenges to international peace and security, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitate a more robust and comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians.

The safety and health of peacekeepers and other United Nations personnel are equally important. There are growing concerns over the rising trend of COVID-19

cases in host countries that make United Nations personnel susceptible to this pandemic. The situation calls for appropriate assistance. Our peacekeepers will be safer from contracting COVID-19 so long as host countries' communities are safe.

A recent report on COVID-19 cases in protection-of-civilians sites in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan is an urgent reminder that something needs to be done as soon as possible. We urge the Secretariat to come up with a concrete plan to contain the situation. The intercommunity spread of COVID-19 can be avoided if action is taken fast and as per World Health Organization guidelines. There is an urgent need for the Secretariat to mobilize resources and capabilities to contain and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees under the protection of United Nations peacekeepers in a context where social distancing is challenging.

In that regard, Rwanda recently partnered with the Central African Republic, a country that hosts a United Nations peacekeeping mission, to build COVID-19 testing capabilities through the training of laboratory technicians and the provision of testing equipment. This practical example of South-South bilateral cooperation shows that with modest, targeted and rapid interventions we can realize significant benefits in the protection of host communities and United Nations peacekeepers against COVID-19.

We welcome previous mandates that explicitly respond to recurring issues of the protection of civilians and sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict. We appreciate that there is increased attention to context-specific pre-deployment training, which is key to improving the operational capacity and performance of peacekeepers.

Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence continues to inflict physical and psychological suffering on women and girls in armed conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic poses extreme risks for women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected situations, mainly because the pandemic makes it more difficult for protection and humanitarian workers to reach vulnerable populations. Women should be at the centre of the response to the pandemic, and socioeconomic plans should be designed with the lives and future of women and girls in mind.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of women at all levels of peacekeeping. Reports show that deploying women in meaningful roles increases the effectiveness of peacekeeping and enhances missions' ability to protect civilians. Rwanda is happy to be among the top contributors of female police in peacekeeping missions. There is ample evidence that employing women in peacekeeping significantly reduces the potential for conflict and confrontation between communities. It provides a broader sense of security to local populations, including women and children. In that regard, we are supporting in practice the United Nations ambition to increase the percentage of female peacekeepers deployed.

The Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians are a non-binding set of pledges to implement best practices in peacekeeping. It is the best instrument that addresses the most relevant aspects of peacekeeping, including assessment and planning, force generation, training and equipping personnel, performance and accountability. The Principles address much broader challenges that undermine the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations conducted in conflict situations. So far 50 Member States, including top troop- and police-contributing countries as well as financial- contributing countries, have endorsed them. We call upon other Member States to come on board.

We also appreciate the role of United Nations police in assisting with the protection of civilians, strengthening and extending law and order, building

confidence and working towards proper and coordinated peace transitions. As peacekeeping missions turn into peacebuilding ones, enhancing policing and law enforcement becomes necessary.

On the political front, Member States and non-State actors should support all efforts by the United Nations and regional organizations, particularly the African Union, in attempts to respond to and mediate conflicts. Peace agreements reached in the Sudan and South Sudan are clear evidence that the primacy of politics in the framework of United Nations partnership with regional organizations makes a collective approach to conflict resolution and conflict de-escalation work.

Finally, we fully appreciate the central role and value of peacekeeping missions with protection-of-civilians mandates; we know what is at stake when we fall short of our expectations and responsibilities and what it will take to make peacekeeping effective now and in future.

Let me reiterate the importance of having a common understanding of the scope and intensity of implementing protection-of-civilians mandates even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnership and cooperation among the United Nations and regional organizations are essential. At the same time, training and properly equipping troops and police should, as such, conform to the realities in the mission field.

Annex 61**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Senegal to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

I would like to congratulate the Republic of Estonia on the holding of this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, a topic that has become a priority in the maintenance of international peace and security.

My delegation has followed with great interest the statements made by Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Prize Laureate and Member of the Elders, who have given a comprehensive overview of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, especially during this difficult period of pandemic.

By adopting resolution 1265 (1999) a little more than 20 years ago, the Security Council took the full measure of the importance of the protection of civilians for the credibility and success of peacekeeping operations. That awareness has been translated into concrete action through, inter alia, the inclusion of explicit provisions on the protection of civilians in the mandates of several peace operations, the deployment of protection of civilians advisers in certain peace missions and the development of a guide on the implementation of protection of civilians mandates for use by United Nations police, and now through response and resilience measures to combat the health crisis.

While there is no doubt that this mechanism has made significant progress, it must be noted, as the Secretary-General's most recent report on this issue (S/2020/366) clearly demonstrates, that civilians continue to be subjected to abuses by non-State armed groups and regular armies alike.

Indeed, in 2019, the United Nations registered more than 20,000 civilians killed or wounded in attacks in 10 countries, while an alarming number of people remain missing in connection with armed conflicts, including 139,000 cases of missing persons submitted to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) alone. As a result, during the period under review, millions of civilians were forced to leave their homes due to conflict, adding to the 70.8 million people worldwide already displaced by conflict or violence at the beginning of the year in question.

In the same year, the World Health Organization (WHO) registered 1,000 security breaches in health facilities, not including the millions of victims of sexual violence. These scourges amply demonstrate the degree of vulnerability of civilians in armed conflict.

My delegation takes this opportunity to pay solemn homage to all those killed and to express sympathy to the millions of other victims that are still suffering.

The already troubling fate of civilians in conflict zones has no doubt deteriorated in the global context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) because of its disruptive effect on the conduct of security and humanitarian operations.

It is against that bleak backdrop that Secretary-General António Guterres on 23 March launched an appeal for an

“immediate global ceasefire... to help create corridors for life-saving aid, to open precious windows for diplomacy, to bring hope to places among the most vulnerable to COVID-19”.

Strongly committed to the ideals of peace, justice and the rule of law, Senegal unreservedly supports that appeal and therefore joins the Secretary-General in urging

all parties to conflicts worldwide — State and non-State alike — to unconditionally enforce them.

In addition to that ambitious appeal, we must pursue efforts to commit State and non-State actors to respecting humanitarian and human rights standards and to include the obligation to protect civilians in peace and ceasefire agreements. Indeed, in the absence of a ceasefire, strict respect for international humanitarian law by all parties to conflicts remains the best — if not the only — alternative to ensure that vulnerable populations receive basic protections and humanitarian services.

That is why I welcome the call to action to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action, launched by France and Germany in September 2019 and endorsed by 43 Member States. Given today's challenges, that call is more than justified and it is our collective duty to heed it. Its success must include the effective protection of civilians and all medical and humanitarian personnel working in the field, as well as their equipment and facilities.

That also requires, as recommended by the Secretary-General in this year's report, that all parties to conflict set out to train their combatants — armed forces and non-State armed groups alike — to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In that regard, it is essential that the United Nations and its partners, such as the ICRC, get involved by providing said parties with the technical assistance and logistical support they need.

It is clear that these measures to ensure respect for international humanitarian law are only preventive provisions that can be violated. It is therefore essential that they be complemented by other measures to ensure full accountability for those who violate them.

In addition to simply affirming the non-negotiable principle of respect for the law, strengthening law enforcement requires creating the conditions to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. That, in turn, requires the establishment of complementary legal instruments at the national, regional and international levels, as well as mechanisms and procedures for the detection and prosecution of international humanitarian law violations.

With the committed legal cooperation of all countries, such a deterrent arsenal would help to put an end to impunity. It would allow us to become aware of violations of humanitarian law and to systematically conduct the investigations necessary to find and arrest the perpetrators in order to bring them before the competent courts.

These fundamental provisions must also be applied to those who perpetrate attacks on peacekeepers, who also often pay a heavy price in the implementation of the protection of civilians mandate. I pay my respects to all the Blue Helmets who, like Captain Mbaye Diagne, have given their lives to protect civilians. I am pleased to note that in two days, the Secretariat will honour them on the occasion of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, which is enshrined in its annual agenda.

In general, States today are responding to COVID-19 with border closures and containment. Although that effectively curbs the spread of the disease, this autarkic approach can only have short-term success as it is economically unsustainable. A more resilient stance should therefore be adopted for the medium and long terms so as to enable both the resumption of economic activity and control of the disease.

We cannot do so through a response that lacks global solidarity and international coordination. We must keep in mind that as long as the coronavirus persists anywhere, the risk of a global resurgence remains very real. In that connection, Senegal, through

its President, Mr. Macky Sall, has called for the cancellation of debt in order to allow developing countries, particularly in Africa, to devote their limited resources to national COVID-19 response plans and to strengthen their resilience.

We also note and commend the establishment of a COVID-19 fund by financial institutions, launched at the very beginning of the pandemic, as an embodiment of the same spirit of solidarity.

With regard to the coordination of response activities, it is important to reaffirm the central role of the WHO in addressing health issues at the global level. The WHO must continue to urge States to work in synergy through dedicated structures and mechanisms at national, community and regional levels.

For its part, Senegal, with the valuable support of the WHO, developed a national preparedness and response plan in mid-January and is participating actively in efforts undertaken within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States and the West African Health Organization, as well as the African Union's Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

This resilient stance also applies to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and all stakeholders must integrate it into the current and post-COVID-19 contexts so as to enable peace missions to continue to fully carry out their mandates in an environment of a global health crisis and its inevitable subsequent recession.

In that vein, the Secretariat and the missions, in conjunction with troop- and police-contributing countries and host countries, must continue — now more than ever — to develop temporary strategies and guidelines that take this health dimension into account in the preparation and training of contingents, in the procedures for their deployment or repatriation and in the conduct of operations in the field.

Troop- and police-contributing countries, for their part, must take ownership of the relevant new provisions by training and equipping their personnel accordingly. In the field, missions must plan and conduct their operations in such a way as to continue to implement their mandates without exposing personnel. Moreover, the cooperation of host countries is critical to protecting mission personnel and maintaining their operational capacity.

In conclusion, my delegation believes that in the absence of a ceasefire, strict and permanent respect for humanitarian law remains the best way to protect civilians. To that end, I call for the strengthening of prevention mechanisms and the systematic application of the principle of accountability for perpetrators of humanitarian crimes. My delegation also remains convinced that the challenges related to COVID-19 require resilience and international solidarity.

Annex 62**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations, Michal Mlynár**

Slovakia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would like to share a few additional reflections in my national capacity.

The current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis not only raises global health and socioeconomic concerns, but also impacts the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Civilians in armed conflict are already vulnerable and the pandemic puts them at even greater risk. COVID-19 exacerbates the suffering caused by conflicts and can potentially lead to the emergence of new conflicts.

The Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire is therefore timely and urgent. Slovakia strongly supports it and urges all parties to conflicts to do the same. We also appreciate other tools for Member States to ensure that human rights are at the centre of the response to the pandemic, including the policy briefs on COVID-19 and human rights, the impact of COVID-19 on women and children, and the guidance note on addressing and countering COVID-19-related hate speech. The Secretary-General's call to action for human rights, issued in February, is also key.

We have witnessed the impact of COVID-19 on peace operations, including limitations of troop rotations and restrictions of movement in order to protect the health, safety and security of United Nations personnel. That unfortunately impedes their fundamental task of maintaining peace and security wherever deployed. Often, civilians pay the highest price. They remain at risk of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, which continues at shocking levels. The COVID-19 pandemic poses extreme risks for women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected situations, particularly as the pandemic makes it more difficult for protection to be provided and for humanitarian workers to reach vulnerable populations. Women and women's organizations should be at the centre of the pandemic response, and socioeconomic plans should be designed with the lives and future of women and girls in mind.

As an active troop- and police-contributing country to United Nations missions, Slovakia endorsed the Declaration of Shared Commitments on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in September 2018 and remains committed to working further on their implementation, including through the effective performance and responsible and disciplined conduct of our peacekeepers in United Nations missions and operations. We subscribe to the initiatives such as the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and the Secretary-General's voluntary compact to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse. The President of the Slovak Republic, Ms. Zuzana Čaputová, is one of the 87 members of the Secretary-General's circle of leadership on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

International law is essential for the protection of civilians, and strengthening compliance with its norms, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, can significantly contribute to avoiding civilian deaths, suffering and displacement. All State and non-State parties to conflicts must abide by their obligations under international law. States should establish appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to comprehensively address violations of international humanitarian law and hold accountable those who violate it.

We strongly support the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its role in the fight against impunity and in bringing perpetrators to justice. Achieving the Court's

universal jurisdiction would be a major step towards ensuring accountability for violations at the national, regional and international levels. We once again urge all States Members of the United Nations that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Rome Statute.

It is also important to highlight the role of the security sector. When reformed and well-governed, it can significantly contribute to political dialogue, arms control, the protection of civilians and respect for human rights, which are the foundations of all States. The security sector plays a key role in preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation or recurrence of armed conflict, which is the most effective way to protect civilians. Slovakia is a long-standing supporter of the security sector governance and reform agenda and is fully committed to continuing to co-chair the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, together with South Africa.

The protection of civilians is incumbent not only upon warring parties, but also upon Governments, which must find the much-needed political will and support to ensure better todays and tomorrows for those unwillingly affected by armed conflict.

Annex 63

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations

We wish to thank the Estonian presidency of the Council for organizing today's open debate and the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2020/366) and briefing. We also thank the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and the Nobel Peace Laureate, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for their comprehensive briefings.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and wishes to add some remarks in its national capacity.

Stepping into the new decade we have been faced with the largest global crisis seen in modern times. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has challenged our humanity and solidarity and tested our commitment to leaving no one behind. It has highlighted the weakest links in our societies and social protection systems and exposed the most vulnerable. However, it has also provided us with the opportunity to build back better, stronger and more resilient. It is our responsibility now to seize the opportunity presented.

It is deeply saddening and concerning that, despite some positive steps and strengthened commitments, the evidence on the ground continues to provide a grim picture of human suffering and an alarming number of casualties in armed conflicts. That is why Slovenia strongly supports the call of the Secretary-General for an immediate global ceasefire in order to ensure delivery of humanitarian assistance to and protection of the most vulnerable to COVID-19 in situations of armed conflict.

It is the primary responsibility of Governments to protect civilians. We need to do more and better when it comes to protecting civilians and the most affected in armed conflict, including by ensuring access to health services and clean water. The protection of civilians is not just an assault on our conscience; it is also our legal obligation. Moreover, it is particularly alarming that not only are civilians continuing to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict, they are also becoming the means itself by which war is waged.

Assisting victims and alleviating the pain of those affected by armed conflict, especially children, has always been among Slovenia's highest priorities. Well over 500 children coming from active or post-conflict areas have been rehabilitated in Slovenia. Psychological and physical assistance and rehabilitation, social rehabilitation training for pre-school and school counsellors, and a mine-risk education programme implemented by the non-profit humanitarian organization ITF Enhancing Human Security are just a few of the examples of my country's efforts to provide for the overall well-being and development of children affected by conflicts. Women, children, refugees, persons with disabilities and older persons continue to be the most affected by armed conflict.

Attacks against schools constitute a major violation of the rights of the child and international law. Strengthening the protection of education from attack and restricting the use of schools and universities for military purposes are important aspects of protecting children in armed conflict. They are essential for ensuring children's right to education and for providing them with a safe and enabling environment during this period. Without such an environment, children will have no chance as youth to participate in and contribute to post-conflict reconstruction. They are the ones that will have to live with the consequences of the war in future. Slovenia has therefore joined others in endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration and continues to promote its implementation.

As the greatest global health crisis in the world since the end of the Second World War, COVID-19 has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of the least protected in societies across the globe, and the threat to lives, security and well-being of those in situations of armed conflict is even greater. Even though women and girls account for the vast majority of the recorded victims of sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflicts, men and boys are not immune to it. It is abhorrent that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be part of armed conflict, including as a tactic of warfare. This is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. We need to do more to prevent its occurrence, prosecute and punish perpetrators and provide help, support and justice to all victims.

Women and youth are important actors in ensuring the protection of civilians. They are often the first responders on the ground, the caregivers, health workers and peacebuilders. They are also the missing piece of the puzzle in finding lasting and sustainable solutions and in lessening the burden of civilians in conflict situations. It is therefore essential that they have an equal role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery.

Preventive action should be our key investment. Only through preventive efforts and the use of preventive-diplomacy tools can the protection of people be achieved and their suffering truly diminished. Respect and compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be ensured, and those who commit crimes against civilians must be prosecuted. There must be no space for immunity. As has been seen in many cases, there can be no sustainable peace without justice. Marking the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, Slovenia published the official Slovene translation of the Conventions together with the three Additional Protocols.

Ensuring accountability and fighting impunity for the most serious crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, are essential components of prevention and protection. They are key to preventing armed conflicts, protecting civilians during those conflicts and building sustainable peace. Such international mechanisms as the International Criminal Court, the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar have important roles to play in these efforts.

Before concluding, let us briefly touch upon the issue of access to humanitarian assistance. Slovenia calls once again on every party in every conflict to fully cooperate with the United Nations, its agencies and its partners in conflict areas to deliver, without any impediments or preconditions, the life-saving assistance to the millions of people who need it.

The protection of civilians is the most important duty of international peace operations and missions. Effective and comprehensive peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations with robust mandates that are flexible enough to provide protection of and assistance to civilian populations are critical. This also requires the Security Council's strong and continuous engagement in protecting civilians on the ground, which includes systematic and timely responses to the grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Annex 64**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations, Agustín Santos Maraver**

[Original: Spanish]

Spain aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for their briefings.

Today's open debate on the protection of civilians comes at an unusual time. We are dealing with a global pandemic that has had effects on multiple levels, and this crisis overlaps with other political challenges, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The spread of the virus has affected millions of people, increasing the risk that tensions, conflicts and divisions in the world will worsen. This is a sensitive time that requires restraint, commitment and determination.

The current crisis calls to mind three important lessons. The first is that we are deeply interconnected. The second is that prevention works. The third is that international cooperation is key to overcoming common challenges. These lessons are applicable in all areas, including in achieving the objectives we pursue in the protection of civilians. I will try to explain this idea with a concrete example in the second part of my statement, but first let me refer to the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366).

The picture that the report paints is frankly bleak; it sets out figures that show the darker side of our species. The problem is very serious, and if we are to address it with well-targeted concrete actions, as the Secretary-General puts it, we must be aware of it. We therefore believe that our best strategy is as follows.

We must remain vigilant so that international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians have a real impact on the protection and lives of people. Since urban conflicts have accentuated the impact of these attacks on the civilian population, it is essential that all parties to the conflict comply with their international obligations and that they are otherwise held accountable for violations. If that is not possible, the Security Council must play a key role in ensuring accountability for serious violations of international law.

Because children are twice victims of armed conflict and deserve special protection, we consider maintaining the presence of protection officers, especially for children and gender, to be essential and, if possible, their presence in peacekeeping missions should be strengthened.

As we have an obligation to prevent attacks on schools, medical facilities and humanitarian workers who carry out exclusively medical work, these attacks must be systematically and forcefully condemned, keeping in mind the duty to protect victims and the obligation to bring those responsible to justice.

Sanctions regimes and counter-terrorism measures must allow for principled humanitarian action and compliance with international humanitarian law.

The foregoing actions are just a few of the actions consistent with the Secretary-General's report, but we know that there are many others. In choosing among them, we must take advantage of those that light the path for us to follow. In this context, I would call to mind the lessons that the current crisis has brought in one area related to the protection of civilians: education in conflict situations.

The first lesson resides in our mutual interconnectedness. We can say today that the Safe Schools Declaration and the related actions taken are saving lives by preserving the right to education for all, even in the most difficult circumstances. This is because those who push for the actions are now linked with those whose lives have been saved. Even a match extinguished in the sea warms the ocean.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has also shown us once again that prevention works, especially in terms of the protection of civilians. The report on attacks on education by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, which is being presented tomorrow at the margins of today's open debate, shows this. Politically driven and resourced awareness and control actions create the conditions for preventing these attacks. The reduction of attacks on schools in recent years has opened future opportunities for entire generations.

The third lesson points to the power of change that international cooperation provides. The third International Conference on Safe Schools, which Spain organized in Palma de Mallorca just a year ago, showed how important it is to stimulate international cooperation and boost political support for meeting this challenge. A growing majority of Member States and regional organizations have endorsed the Declaration which, for us, marks a clear step towards its universalization. We encourage those who have not yet done so to endorse the Declaration, and we welcome the draft resolution on the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, which Qatar has introduced and Spain has co-sponsored.

Allow me to share three final considerations that seem to us to be central to the protection-of-civilians agenda.

First, we are convinced that a gender perspective is vital to seeking concrete solutions and successfully addressing this challenge. We must therefore continue to promote this agenda in an ongoing and cross-cutting manner, prioritizing actions towards protection and respect for human rights and its close link with international peace and security in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000).

Secondly, we need to strengthen our actions in the area of humanitarian diplomacy. The Spanish Government is determined to maintain the protection of civilians as one of the priorities of its foreign action and humanitarian action, working with national and international actors while strengthening actions in humanitarian diplomacy. We will continue to take concrete steps to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law and to work on the commitments made at the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, in Geneva.

Thirdly, we need to persevere in the fight against impunity. We must guarantee the mechanisms that bring perpetrators of atrocious crimes to justice, including the International Criminal Court (ICC). That is the best way to honour the victims, do justice and deter future attacks. We encourage those States that have not done so to sign the Rome Statute and accept the jurisdiction of the ICC. I would also like to highlight in this regard the work that can be done by the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, in collaboration with the United Nations, to prevent violations of international humanitarian law.

Allow me to conclude by thanking the Secretary-General and, through him, all the people who comprise the United Nations family for their work and dedication and for their commendable efforts in favour of the protection of civilians in the most difficult of circumstances. Far from their loved ones, they are risking their own lives to make this world a better, more humane place.

We must also acknowledge the excellent work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and that

of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, including its recent conclusions on Yemen, the Central African Republic and Afghanistan.

The United Nations can count on Spain to make progress in achieving the objectives set forth in the Secretary-General's report by implementing its recommendations.

Annex 65**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations**

My delegation warmly congratulates Estonia on its assumption of the presidency for the month of May and believes that it will be a successful tenure. We appreciate Estonia for organizing this discussion on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as it is civilians who face the brunt of the ruthless actions of terrorist groups that have little respect for human life and human rights in the pursuit of their destructive agendas.

As this organ is aware, the people of Sri Lanka experienced nearly three decades of brutal separatist terrorism. During that time, the ruthless terrorist organization in Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), used civilians over and over again as pawns to pursue their bloody and destructive agenda of creating a separate State in the country. Civilians were used as human shields, were forcibly recruited as cadres and suicide bombers and as workers to construct defences for the LTTE and to perform a variety of other tasks during that treacherous period, and children were recruited as child soldiers. Food and medicine provided to civilians living in the terrorist-held areas were forcibly taken by the terrorists for their own survival. Civilians were forced to pay taxes from their hard-earned income into the coffers of that terrorist organization; even Sri Lankan Tamils living outside of Sri Lanka were subject to extortion. If they did not comply, their lives and those of their family members were at risk.

No one was safe from their clutches, and religious clergy, innocent men, women and children and political leaders from all the ethnic communities in Sri Lanka — Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burghers — were brutally massacred. That was the reality in Sri Lanka before 2009. Normal civilian life did not exist in the north or east of Sri Lanka, and people were not free to exercise their democratic franchise or have access to their basic rights. Civilian life was affected to a great extent in the other provinces of the country as well.

With the noble aim of liberating those civilians from the grasps of the most ruthless terrorist outfit in the world — as designated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation — the Sri Lankan armed forces launched the country's largest hostage rescue operation. The massive humanitarian operations that were conducted during the final stages of eradicating terrorism from the country focused on ensuring the safety and security of all civilians and on their rescue from the bondage of terrorism. Sri Lanka, with the assistance of bilateral partners, multilateral agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations, began delivering on its responsibility of freeing its civilian population from that terrorist organization. During the humanitarian operation, the Sri Lankan armed forces adopted a number of measures to ensure the safety of civilians and to distinguish between military targets and civilian occupied areas. It is pertinent to reiterate that action by the Sri Lankan security forces during the conflict was against the LTTE, a group designated as a terrorist organization by 32 countries and whose designation has been continuously and consistently retained, and not aimed at any community in the country.

With the end of the conflict, Sri Lanka faced new challenges that included the rehabilitation of former combatants, among which were child soldiers. Reuniting those children with their families after rehabilitation and addressing their educational needs were the utmost priority in the immediate post-conflict phase. The programme launched under the Commissioner of Probation and Child Care Services resulted in the rehabilitation and reintegration of all 594 former child soldiers, providing Sri Lanka with a success story in that respect to share with the world. All former child

soldiers who did not possess a national identity card were issued with one and were supported in their education through the facilitation of school enrolment and the provision of school supplies and financial assistance, including scholarships.

It is noteworthy that special attention was paid to those whose education had been disrupted owing to conscription by the terrorist organization and who wished to complete their formal education. As a result, the rehabilitation programme enabled a number of former child soldiers to participate in the national examinations. Eleven former child soldiers took up the university entrance examination, with four being successful, either during or after their rehabilitation programme. Three were able to receive a university education. Many others have taken part in vocational training programmes. Thus, many of the former child soldiers are now employed as account clerks, computer instructors, mechanics, carpenters, farmers, fishermen and employees in the garment manufacturing industry.

In the above context, when every effort was being made by the Sri Lankan Government to protect its civilians from the terrorist organization and the consequences of its brutal activities, it is indeed tragic that certain segments of the international community, including former United Nations officials, sympathized with the ideologies and actions of that organization. It is evident that even today, some of them continue to regret the downfall of the ruthless terrorist organization and fail to acknowledge the torment and suffering of the helpless civilians both in Sri Lanka and abroad.

That was reflected recently when a former high-level United Nations official was seen speaking at an event organized by the rump of the LTTE — an internationally banned outfit. Such circumstances should compel the United Nations to thoroughly screen the credentials of those working for it. It is now clear that the former high-level official was propagating the views of a ruthless terrorist organization, while carrying out her functions at the United Nations main human rights body. She has let down all the civilians who were held hostage by the terrorist group and has only sought to use this organ to pursue personal agendas, thereby calling into question the work carried out during her term of office. Such actions should not be allowed to continue within this organ, where the personal agendas of a few allow for sovereign States and their sovereign decisions to be vilified and discredited.

Sri Lanka remains committed to finding innovative and pragmatic solutions driven by the domestic context to protect the country's national interest, guided by the provisions of the Constitution and the will of the citizens expressed through democratic means.

Annex 66

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations

This statement is issued on behalf of the members of the Group of Friends on the protection of civilians in armed conflict: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay. The Group of Friends thanks the Estonian presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate. We also thank today's briefers for their statements.

This debate takes place in unprecedented times. A year ago, we were celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the protection of civilians resolution 1265 (1999) at the Security Council and committing to strengthening the protection agenda for the years to come. Today, protection challenges are as acute as ever, and the protection of civilians becomes even more crucial in the time of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The pandemic poses a threat to human security and exacerbates the vulnerability of people living in conflict situations. It magnifies existing protection challenges. The primary responsibility to protect civilians lies with the parties to armed conflict and includes facilitating safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access. In that regard, measures to combat COVID-19 must not negatively impact the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection. We must also be watchful for measures that increase the vulnerability of certain groups or that unnecessarily limit the ability of United Nations mission personnel to fulfil their mandates.

The Group of Friends welcomes and continues to support the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire in armed conflict in the light of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We call on the Security Council to endorse that call without delay.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/366) paints a bleak picture of the state of the protection of civilians. The number of civilian deaths and injuries remains appallingly high, as does the number of displaced persons, who are often forced to flee multiple times. In that regard, we take note of the Secretary-General's establishment of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement. Indiscriminate attacks occur with horrifying frequency and have devastating consequences for the civilian population, in particular children. In that regard, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of two of the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we reiterate the importance of protecting children during armed conflicts, including by guaranteeing unimpeded access for humanitarian actors.

Conflict-related sexual violence persists, often as part of a broader strategy. All too often, the wounded and sick, as well as the medical and humanitarian personnel and their facilities, are intentionally attacked. Given the importance of independent reporting, the decrease in journalists reporting from conflict zones owing to the high level of insecurity is of grave concern.

The Secretary-General has emphasized that civilian suffering could be significantly reduced if international humanitarian law and international human rights law are respected. We recognize the Security Council's consistent calls for all parties to observe their obligations under international humanitarian law and urge immediate compliance. Member States, as well as parties to armed conflicts, are obliged to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. National implementation of international humanitarian law is the cornerstone of that important source of law. Accordingly, we commend the resolution adopted by the thirty-third International Conference of the International Committee

of the Red Cross (ICRC), on national implementation of international humanitarian law, and support the Secretary-General's enhanced focus on national implementation of the protection of civilians agenda.

Moreover, we echo the Secretary-General's recommendations to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law. Our international legal framework on protection of civilians is sound; the challenge lies in its implementation. The Group of Friends welcomes the adoption by the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of an amendment to the Rome Statute to include the war crime of intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in non-international armed conflicts. We call on States parties to the Statute to ratify or accept the amendment. Fighting impunity is of paramount importance to ensure that violations do not go unpunished and to deliver justice to victims.

The Group of Friends wishes to highlight the active role played by the Council since the last open debate (see S/PV.8534) by welcoming the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), on missing persons, and 2475 (2019), on persons with disabilities. We urge Member States to implement all the appropriate measures necessary to clarify the fate of the missing and to fully cooperate with all relevant actors, especially the ICRC. As resolution 2475 (2019) is crucial to the better protection of persons with disabilities, we also call on the Secretary-General and the Member States to strengthen their implementation efforts.

Despite progress, the Group of Friends would like to comment on the risks and opportunities in relation to the protection of civilians identified in the Secretary-General's report.

First, we remain gravely concerned at the humanitarian harm being caused during active hostilities in populated areas. The nature of armed conflict in urban areas poses acute challenges for the protection of civilians, and more can be done to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law during armed conflict and to advance the protection agenda. Strict application of the rules and principles of international humanitarian law, including on precaution, humanity, distinction, necessity and proportionality, is required by all parties to conflict. In that regard, the Group of Friends takes note of the consultation process towards developing a political declaration to enhance the protection of civilians in urban warfare, including protection from the possible humanitarian impacts of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Secondly, new technologies are changing human interaction profoundly, including in times of armed conflict. Digital technologies have helped protect civilians in situations of armed conflicts and have offered a range of opportunities for more efficient clarification in cases of missing persons, as well as in the recording of casualties. At the same time, those technologies have also been misused, thus exacerbating violence. The Group of Friends stresses the necessity of responding to the malicious use of digital technology and calls on all Member States to use those new assets in compliance with their existing obligations under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and human rights law. In that regard, the Group of Friends would also like to emphasize that malicious cyber operations on medical facilities, as currently experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot be considered acceptable in either times of peace or of armed conflict.

Thirdly, we note the increased attention given in the Secretary-General's report to civilian suffering linked to the environmental impact of armed conflict and climate change. Armed conflicts can contribute to significant environmental

degradation that, in turn, affects the population. Environmental damage in conflicts should, therefore, be more visible in humanitarian reporting. We therefore call for a better understanding of the matter.

Fourthly, the Group of Friends notes that 29 May is International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. We welcome and celebrate the focus on women and peacekeeping. The Group recalls that women peacekeepers deployed in civilian, military and police roles, including in leadership positions, have a significant impact on the pursuit of peace and protection of civilians, and we encourage the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We pay tribute to the service and sacrifice of all peacekeepers, particularly while implementing mandates to protect civilians.

The Group of Friends reiterates the importance that we attach to the full and effective implementation of protection of civilians mandates by relevant United Nations peacekeeping operations, and we encourage safe, meaningful and effective engagement with local and affected communities in that regard. The Group takes note of the 2019 Department of Peace Operations policy on the protection of civilians and of the recent launch of the handbook entitled “Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping”. We stress that the Security Council must ensure that United Nations peacekeeping operations have clear and realistic mandates and that the General Assembly must allocate resources to them that are consistent with those mandates.

We also encourage peacekeeping operations to take into account gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue in the implementation of their mandates and to deploy gender advisers. We further underline the importance of peacekeeping personnel receiving extensive and adequate pre-deployment and supplementary in-mission training in order to implement protection of civilians mandates appropriately. The Security Council should support the inclusion of protection of civilians mandates in relevant peacekeeping operations as an integral part of comprehensive political strategies, in coordination with the Secretariat, troop- and police-contributing countries and host States. Finally, we call for results and accountability in the implementation of protection of civilians mandates, in line with resolution 2436 (2018).

As the United Nations marks its seventy-fifth anniversary, the protection of civilians — or the lack thereof — continues to have a huge impact on the priorities of the Organization in its three pillars. More consistency and political will are needed in the overall efforts to enhance protection of civilians and implementation of the law and political commitments, both by Member States and parties to conflict and at the level of the Security Council. The Group of Friends is committed to doing its part and to contributing to global-level advocacy to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

Annex 67**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations**

At the outset, Thailand welcomes the Secretary-General's recently released report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366), which is submitted against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Furthermore, Thailand views the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire to reinforce diplomatic action as significant. The initiative could help create conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and bring hope to those most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic continues to have a severe impact on the protection of civilians, both in conflict contexts and from domestic and gender-based violence. By looking ahead to the post-COVID-19 era, we can see that the vulnerability of the least protected in society, especially those in conflict-affected areas, will be exacerbated in terms of health and security. In conflict-affected States, where health-care systems are already weakened, the pandemic will worsen the situation for the vulnerable, particularly the elderly, who are more prone to the virus. Women and children, as well as persons with disabilities, will face greater difficulties in gaining access to health care and other essential services.

Therefore, while we are assessing measures to move forward in the new normal, it is imperative for all stakeholders to devote their efforts to protecting these vulnerable groups by upholding their rights within the obligation to protect civilians under international law. We must create strong partnerships among all stakeholders, share best practices and provide socioeconomic opportunities to the vulnerable through sustainable development approaches.

Thailand wishes to highlight the elements that we believe deserve special emphasis in today's discussion.

First, priority must be given to raising awareness of, and respect for, obligations related to the protection of civilians under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. The State has the primary responsibility to protect its citizens, and all parties to armed conflict must honour and strictly comply with their obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. While all personnel in peacekeeping missions need to clearly understand their protection mandates, priorities and responsibilities, efforts must be made to promote awareness and understanding among all parties and stakeholders, including civilians themselves. In that regard, the protection of women and children and the elimination of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping missions have been one of Thailand's priorities.

Secondly, we need stronger partnerships to strengthen the protection of civilians. This requires an integrated approach among military, police and civilian components at all levels. In turn, they must coordinate with national authorities, local communities and relevant humanitarian organizations in the field. Multi-stakeholder engagement is also key, while all players must be given space for meaningful participation. All stakeholders must exchange information on frank and clear situation assessments, supported by adequate capabilities and resources and further underpinned by practical and achievable expectations.

Thirdly, it is essential to reduce threats to sustainable peace and development and to build and sustain a safe and enabling environment for civilians. We support the Secretary-General's view that the most effective way to protect civilians is through a long-term process and a comprehensive approach applied before, during and after

conflict. Sustaining peace requires us to view peacebuilding more holistically, as part of the peace continuum from conflict prevention and conflict resolution to laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development. By achieving sustainable peace and development, civilians, including those in vulnerable groups, would gain a better opportunity to thrive and attain better living conditions.

Thailand encourages peacekeepers to take on the role of early peacebuilders. By promoting development initiatives in the field, peacekeepers could play a crucial role in promoting sustainable peace in post-conflict societies, thereby complementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. Our peacekeepers have been incorporating development aspects into their assigned task in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

It is also important to build a sustainable environment for civilians where their safety is ensured and their human rights promoted and protected. We must also recall the tremendous role of women as agents of change in conflict situations, especially when it comes to building trust and ensuring protective environments for vulnerable groups. The reach and impact that women have in the local community have long been underestimated.

Last but not least, an area that Thailand has always viewed with a discerning eye is the issue of capacity-building and training. All peacekeepers have to be properly prepared, trained and equipped to meet the challenges they will face in the field. It must be underlined time and again that intensive predeployment and periodic in-mission training, including training of trainers, both on operational tasks and other protection-related elements, are vital. As an active troop- and police-contributing country, Thai peacekeepers are trained as a standard procedure to assist the local population in their efforts to prevent the relapse of armed conflict and ensure sustainable development.

As we aspire to becoming a regional centre of excellence on the issue of children and armed conflict and for the United Nations Staff Officers Course, we have been working closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Department of Peace Operations. We are also willing to share our experiences and lessons learned in these areas with all interested partners. Thailand also wishes to exchange views and best practices through the Peacebuilding Commission, which provides a constructive forum to discuss integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery. Furthermore, Thailand continues to support the delivery of consistent and coherent training, in collaboration with relevant agencies, to our peacekeeping personnel for all mandated tasks. Those elements include international law, gender-based issues, the protection of civilians, child protection, conflict-related sexual violence and cultural sensitivity. There is more we can and want to do.

Thailand wishes to conclude with the parting thought that, in its view, durable peace is not tenable if civilians lack security and are not safe. We need to continue to evolve our discussions on enhancing and reinvigorating the protection of civilians agenda in order to meet the new challenges of that protection.

Annex 68

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu

I would like to thank Estonia for organizing this timely meeting, as well as the Secretary-General for his insightful presentation. I also thank the briefers.

It is 70 years since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, and 2019 marked the twentieth anniversary of the inclusion of the protection of civilians on the agenda of the Security Council. We are equipped with comprehensive rules, reliable tools and a strong framework. However, while the number of human-made disasters is increasing, we cannot provide adequate and timely responses to such crises. We witness the erosion of humanity, day by day.

As the Secretary-General reports, conflicts forced millions of civilians to flee their homes last year, adding to the 70.8 million people already displaced by conflict and violence by the beginning of 2019 (see S/2020/366). We now live in a world where one person is forcibly displaced every two seconds as a result of conflict or persecution.

In 2019, more than 41 million people were displaced in their own country. In Libya, the number of internally displaced persons has almost doubled, to around 350,000, due to the military campaign to overthrow the legitimate Government in Tripoli. In Syria, only last year 1.8 million people were displaced, 1 million of whom escaped from the indiscriminate attacks of the Al-Assad regime in the north-west towards the Turkish border. In Myanmar, fighting displaced more civilians in the first three months of this year than in all of 2019.

The number of refugees continues to grow, reaching 25.9 million, more than half of whom are under the age of 18. Millions of these people have been denied access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment and freedom of movement. In humanitarian crises women and children continue to suffer the most from sexual violence and other violations of international humanitarian law.

The spread of the coronavirus disease has further worsened the already dire conditions in many parts of the world by exacerbating the vulnerability of the least protected people. The current situation of health-care systems in certain parts of the world gives a grim outlook for the upcoming months.

In Libya, conflict and the pandemic present a significant threat to life. According to a recent survey of the World Health Organization, only 20 per cent of primary health centres are delivering services in the country. The recent attacks on health infrastructure by General Haftar's forces and their backers diminish the capacity of Libyans to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. In Syria, a health facility was attacked every four days last year. The majority of the attacks occurred in the north-west. In Yemen, where civilians face the largest humanitarian crisis of our time, 8.9 million people remain in acute need of medical care; yet only 50 per cent of medical facilities function due, in part, to conflict-related damage.

It is therefore more urgent than ever that the global ceasefire appeal by the Secretary-General is implemented in order to help create conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This is also important for the adaptation of peacekeeping operations to evolving situations so as to ensure the protection of civilians.

The suffering that engulfs people in the different complex emergencies is also experienced by humanitarian personnel, who are doing their best to provide relief for those in need. We would like to commend the tireless efforts of the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as other United Nations humanitarian agencies, in their life-saving work.

As Member States, we need to increase our financial resources in order to help the United Nations in its humanitarian activities. Turkey is committed to continuing its leading role in various humanitarian efforts across a wide geographical area, from Syria, Yemen and Palestine to Somalia and Myanmar. The medical assistance we have provided to 93 countries since the start of the pandemic is in addition to our regular humanitarian aid deliveries throughout the world.

Meanwhile, Turkey now hosts 20 per cent of all refugees around the globe. We will continue to assist Syrians in need in our homeland, and also across our borders with Syria. We will continue to mobilize our resources for these people, including by facilitating United Nations cross-border operations — a lifeline mechanism for Syrian civilians.

Delivering humanitarian aid is our common responsibility, and we see it as a crucial element to achieve international peace and stability. In fact, humanitarian access is a requirement of international humanitarian law, and it cannot be a matter for negotiation.

I therefore reiterate the request that I made to the Council last week. In the face of the pandemic, we need the United Nations cross-border mechanism for Syria more than ever, and the Council has the responsibility to authorize it without delay and for at least 12 months. This will be a litmus test for the Council and its members as to how able they are to address the request of millions of people who are completely dependent on these deliveries.

Targeting civilians can have no justification. All parties to conflict have an international legal obligation to respect international humanitarian law. We must act and establish genuine accountability mechanisms in order to end impunity.

In that regard, we welcome the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the establishment of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. We also commend the efforts of the Gambia in bringing a case before the International Court of Justice in 2019, which led to a landmark provisional ruling for Rohingya Muslims.

At the same time, much work still needs to be done to hold perpetrators accountable. This also requires avoiding any engagement with terrorist organizations that would risk conferring legitimacy. Since the start of the pandemic, the Kurdish Workers Party/People's Protection Units have perpetrated more than 30 terrorist attacks in northern Syria, including mortar and rocket shelling, targeting civilians. It is noteworthy that all these attacks have occurred at a time when the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces pretend to comply with the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire.

Whether we are donors or recipients, or both, we share a responsibility towards humankind. The protection of civilians is a long-term investment for our collective security, peace and prosperity. This week marks the fourth anniversary of the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit, which has been key in advancing the agenda for humankind. It is time to revisit existing commitments to strengthen the centrality of protection.

Annex 69**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, Lana Nusseibeh**

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open video-teleconference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also thank the briefers for their statements. These are difficult times for civilians in conflict-affected areas around the world. In addition to the existing threats they face — violence, food insecurity and displacement, among others — the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic presents a dramatic new threat to civilians and has created new challenges to their safety.

In order to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on civilians around the world, the United Arab Emirates takes this opportunity to renew its support for and commitment to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. As the Secretary-General has underscored, that is the most effective way to protect civilians. The appeal is also an opportunity to remind us of our shared humanity, and we hope that other Member States will fully support this initiative.

Protecting vulnerable populations, including by providing medical care in conflict situations around the world, is at the centre of the humanitarian programmes of the United Arab Emirates and its efforts to support the global fight against COVID-19. We have provided aid to more than 50 countries, including many affected by conflict, such as Somalia, Afghanistan and Yemen. We have partnered with the World Health Organization to support the worldwide delivery of critical medical equipment through Dubai's International Humanitarian City, and we have launched an international air bridge operation, in partnership with the World Food Programme, which will enable the movement of life-saving cargo and personnel to where they are needed most.

Allow me to turn now to the content of the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/366). As has been the case in recent years, violations of international humanitarian law by non-State actors continue unabated. In Yemen, for instance, the Houthis use human shields, deliberately attack critical civilian infrastructure and intentionally obstruct the delivery of humanitarian assistance. These constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law. Left unanswered, such violations of international humanitarian law contribute to the erosion of the essential set of rules that seek to mitigate the effects of armed conflict.

The United Arab Emirates expresses its continued commitment to supporting all efforts towards ending sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. We note with concern the analysis in the Secretary-General's report of the patterns of conflict-related sexual violence during displacement and in the midst of hostilities. The United Arab Emirates is a donor to the United Nations trust fund to address sexual violence in conflict and will continue to implement the outcomes of the Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises conference it co-hosted last year in Oslo, including through funding initiatives targeting sexual violence.

Training and capacity-development are a core element of promoting accountability and State compliance with international obligations. In addition to strictly national accountability mechanisms, it is important to highlight the role that international instruments can play when working closely with the sovereign State concerned and at its request, such as the Security Council-established United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We take this opportunity today to reiterate our support for the Team's mandate and, in particular, its critical work documenting sexual and gender-based crimes against religious minorities.

The United Arab Emirates remains committed to bridging the gap between rhetoric and implementation. In order to do so effectively, we would like to propose four recommendations.

First, we urge the Security Council to tailor and apply the range of tools at its disposal to address effectively the growing threat to civilians posed by non-State actors, and to ensure their compliance. Too often, Security Council resolutions, including those imposing measures under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, are ignored by non-State actors.

Secondly, the United Arab Emirates would like to express its support for Security Council efforts to negotiate a resolution, welcoming the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. We urge Council members to overcome their divisions. At this moment of crisis, unity of action is essential.

Thirdly, the United Arab Emirates would like to commend the Secretary-General for the report's comprehensive approach, which highlights the growing challenge of protecting civilians from such threats as the malicious use of digital technologies and as climate change. These are no longer the threats of tomorrow, but the threats of today. We encourage the Council to incorporate more regularly in its analysis the impact of these challenges on the maintenance of international peace and security.

Finally, it is important that measures taken by Member States to address the COVID-19 pandemic be consistent with international humanitarian law and its fundamental principles.

The United Arab Emirates will spare no effort in promoting the protection of civilians and upholding international law. We call on the Security Council and fellow Member States to join us in this endeavour.

Annex 70**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, Sergiy Kyslytsya**

I would like to express my appreciation to the Estonian presidency for holding this important debate to discuss the current state of and challenges to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including implications connected to the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for presenting his report on the issue (S/2020/366) as well as his timely initiatives aimed at protecting the most vulnerable from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The call for an immediate global ceasefire, which Ukraine, whose population suffers from an ongoing foreign armed aggression, immediately supported, is directly linked to our today's discussion. This initiative is an important part of our common fight against the pandemic, which has already adversely impacted the international community's efforts in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Secretary-General's report this year provides a detailed description of both current risks as well as opportunities in the area of protection of civilians, including the role of digital technologies and social media in conflict situations. We know from our own experience how damaging the impact can be of cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, of blockades against alternative sources of information, of the deliberate spreading of disinformation and of incitement to violence.

We note the emphasis in the report on the environmental impact of conflicts on civilian suffering. In this regard, we value the reference to the International Law Commission draft principles on the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts, in the deliberations on which Ukraine took an active part.

Unfortunately, since the first Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV.4312), the situation has not improved, and hundreds of recommendations presented over the past 20 years remain unimplemented despite their enduring relevance.

As a result, this year's report records unprecedented figures for losses among civilians. In 2019 alone, more than 20,000 civilians were killed or injured in 10 conflicts, including that caused by the Russian aggression against my country. Accountability for each loss of life should be established. This is one of the main preconditions for achieving sustainable peace.

We agree with the Secretary-General that these figures clearly signal to the international community the need to change the approach to accountability and to strengthen collective responsibility to prevent, stop and ensure non-repetition of attacks against civilians in conflict situations.

At the same time, we regret that the report did not pay due attention to the protection of civilians in occupied territories or to the insufficient implementation of relevant thematic United Nations resolutions. In the second part of my statement, I will address some of these gaps.

Unfortunately, Ukraine has become an example of the consequences of the violation by a permanent member of the Security Council of norms and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law. For more than six years, Russian aggression has continued to claim the lives of civilians in my country. That international armed conflict and the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city

of Sevastopol turned the protection of civilians for my country from an academic subject to a very practical daily issue.

In the resolutions of the General Assembly on this question, special emphasis is placed on the necessity to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. Referring to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Additional Protocol I thereto, of 1977, the General Assembly qualified Russia as an occupying Power and urged it to uphold all of its obligations under applicable international law.

Meanwhile, according to the twenty-ninth report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the human rights situation in Ukraine, during the entire conflict period OHCHR recorded a total of 3,052 conflict-related civilian deaths: 1,812 men, 1,056 women, 98 boys, 49 girls and 37 adults whose sex is unknown. Taking into account the 298 persons who perished on board Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17 on 17 July 2014, the total death toll of the conflict on civilians has reached at least 3,350. The number of injured civilians so far is estimated to exceed 7,000.

The armed conflict continues to affect the civilian population's enjoyment of economic and social rights, especially by the more-than 5 million residents of the conflict-affected areas and internally displaced persons. Children, older persons and persons in vulnerable situations are at increased risk of being left behind in achieving sustainable development because of the conflict, the OHCHR report stated. The dire humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions continues to deteriorate. Furthermore, the harassment by the Russian Federation of commercial vessels passing through the illegally constructed Kerch Strait bridge between Russia and temporarily occupied Crimea and its restriction of international shipping there further aggravate the economic and social situation and the suffering of the civilian population in the broader region already affected by the attempted annexation of Crimea and the ongoing armed conflict in Donbas.

More than 3.4 million people are expected to require humanitarian assistance in 2020. Over half a million people live in the areas directly affected by the armed conflict, while another 2 million people are exposed to landmines and explosive remnants of war. This area, according to the United Nations, has already become one of the most mine-contaminated stretches of land in the world. We are particularly concerned at the latest reports of shelling of civilian infrastructure by the Russian occupation forces, as well as the use of civilian facilities to hide military equipment. It reminds us of a well-known practice of the Russian armed forces of hiding behind the civilians, widely used in the orchestrated occupation of the Crimean peninsula back in 2014.

In the context of the spread of the acute respiratory coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the state of the protection of the life and health of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories has become even more alarming and requires special attention from the international community.

As party to the conflict, Russia persists in disregarding its duty as occupying Power under international humanitarian law to ensure and maintain the public health of the population, and is using the recent aggravation of the humanitarian situation as a smokescreen for further attacks on the rights and freedoms of the residents of Crimea.

The spread of the pandemic did not stop the Russian authorities from announcing another conscription into the occupying army of the Russian Federation, which is a war crime. In March 2020, a decree by the Russian President to deprive Ukrainian citizens of the right to own land in Crimea became yet another uncouth

demonstration of Moscow's disregard for its responsibilities under international humanitarian law.

Moreover, for more than three years, the occupying Power has shown the utmost disrespect for the International Court of Justice by ignoring its order, which demands the restoration of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People and the protection of the identity of the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar communities under temporary occupation. In addition, Russia continues to block proper and unhindered access for international monitoring missions, primarily by OHCHR, to the occupied territories.

Given this situation and in order to enable the provision of the necessary medical assistance to the civilian population in the occupied areas, we demand that the Russian Federation ensure unhindered access there to Ukrainian competent authorities and medical staff, and provide, on a constant basis, exhaustive information on the spread of COVID-19 in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and on measures it is undertaking to assist the population of these territories to cope with the pandemic. Russia should make all efforts to prevent the spreading of the COVID-19 from the occupied territory to other areas and neighbouring States.

Last year, we celebrated the seventieth anniversary the Geneva Conventions, the cornerstone documents that brought greater protection of each individual from the scourges of war. Ukraine pays special attention to issues related to compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights in armed conflicts, as well as to preventing and responding to forced displacement and protecting women and children affected by armed conflict, including combat conflict-related sexual violence.

As a party to core international instruments related to the protection of civilians, we constantly promote and support all efforts aimed at strengthening their implementation and advocate respect for human rights and international humanitarian law be ensured at both bilateral and multilateral forums.

In contrast, the other party to the conflict, the Russian Federation, ignores General Assembly resolutions and OHCHR recommendations, taking a cherry-picking approach to its obligations under international humanitarian law. Last year, Russia recalled the statement made at the ratification of Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts. That statement recognized the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission, which is a key mechanism for achieving the objectives undertaken by States parties to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and to Protocol I to respect and ensure respect for the provisions of those treaties. That move was quite revealing in that it exposed Russia's disregard for international humanitarian law and its aversion to the Commission's mandate to investigate alleged facts of grave breaches, as defined in the Conventions and the Protocol, or other serious violations thereof. Russia takes a similar approach to evading responsibility vis-à-vis the implementation of European Court of Human Rights decisions. In the light of all the above, the dangerous trend of Russia's abdication of its legal obligations has to be duly reflected and assessed in the next Secretary-General's report.

Time and again, we urge Russia to uphold all its obligations under applicable international law as an occupying Power, in particular to ensure proper and unimpeded access for international human rights monitoring missions and human rights non-governmental organizations to Crimea, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 71/205, 72/190, 73/263 and 74/168; immediately release without preconditions Ukrainian citizens who have been unlawfully detained; end the practice of transfers of its own population to the occupied territories and forcible transfers and deportations of protected persons, including detainees, to areas outside

the occupied territory; and refrain from compelling residents of Crimea to swear allegiance to and serve in the armed forces of the Russian Federation, to name but a few.

To conclude, I would like to quote Judge and former President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals Theodor Meron, who, in his essay “Closing the Accountability Gap: Concrete Steps Toward Ending Impunity for Atrocity Crimes”, wrote that,

“ensuring accountability for atrocity crimes should not be seen as a mere political option: one choice among many facing national authorities and diplomats. It should be understood as a political, legal, and fundamentally human and humanitarian imperative”.

Annex 71

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

Uruguay thanks Estonia for having convened this timely high-level open video-teleconference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which allows us to assess the current situation facing peoples in contexts of armed conflict and to express various points of view on the concrete steps that should be taken to implement this agenda. My delegation also expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the valuable information contained in his report on the issue (S/2020/366).

Uruguay aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians and will offer some clarifications at the national level.

In 2019, tens of thousands of human beings were killed or injured; women and girls were subjected to terrible acts of sexual or gender-based violence; thousands of indiscriminate attacks against essential civilian infrastructure, in particular hospitals and schools, were recorded; famine caused by conflict and often used as a tactic of war devastated entire regions; alarming numbers continued to be added to the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons; an increasing number of people were victims of enforced disappearances; and the obstruction of humanitarian access and attacks perpetrated against human rights activists and defenders continued to increase.

In his report, the Secretary-General defines 2019, in terms of the situation of civilians, as a year of suffering. Today entire societies face an invisible, ruthless and deadly new enemy: the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which is exacerbating the extreme vulnerability of the millions of people already suffering the ravages of war.

Uruguay strongly supports the Secretary-General's call to implement an immediate and global ceasefire aimed at facilitating efforts to tackle the pandemic and alleviate the situation of civilians.

Our delegation wishes to emphasize the following aspects, which are considered priorities in efforts to advance the implementation of the agenda on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, it is necessary to respond to the challenge of ensuring strict compliance by States and all parties to conflict with international humanitarian law, especially the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, and with international human rights law. The alarming failure to abide by those norms is translating into tremendous suffering for the civilian population.

Initiatives should also be encouraged that promote respect for these core standards. In that respect, Uruguay has reaffirmed its commitment to international humanitarian law and its implementation, joining the call for action to bolster respect for international humanitarian law and principles-based humanitarian action, launched by France and Germany.

Secondly, greater protection must be ensured for hospitals, medical infrastructure, the wounded and sick, and personnel carrying out medical tasks. Four years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), parties to conflict continue to carry out indiscriminate attacks and bombings against hospitals and medical personnel, blocking humanitarian access and illegally seizing medical material and instruments necessary to serve the civilian population in conflict areas.

The World Health Organization registered 1,006 security-related incidents affecting health care in 2019, resulting in 825 victims in 11 countries and territories. The recent attack on a maternity hospital in Kabul, which claimed the lives of mothers, newborn babies and medical staff, shocked the international community by its fiendish cruelty. All this indicates that there is still a long way to go before we see the effective implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). Efforts must be redoubled to safeguard the provision of health care in conflict at a time when hospitals and health workers are also engaged in the fight against COVID-19.

Thirdly, particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable segments of the population, including children, women, the elderly, the sick, people with disabilities and marginalized and displaced persons living in conflict areas where essential services such as water, sanitation, health care and education have broken down or completely collapsed. Those groups are the ones that suffer from the most devastating effects of war and are now also exposed to the worst impacts of COVID-19. Of particular concern is the increase in the number of serious violations against children and incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, perpetrated mainly against women and girls. Home confinement, social distancing, difficulties in accessing justice and social services, and the economic impact of the crisis could increase the incidence of such acts of violence.

In order to improve the situation of civilians on the ground, Uruguay endorsed the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Given the increase in the number of attacks against education, the military occupation of schools and educational centres, and the violence and threats against teaching personnel, Uruguay adhered to the Safe Schools Declaration.

Fourthly, parties should refrain from using explosive weapons in densely populated areas. My delegation notes with particular concern the Secretary-General's statement in his report that in 2019 the use of explosive weapons in urban areas continued to have serious consequences for innocent civilians, who, for the ninth consecutive year, represented more than 90 per cent of those killed or injured by such weapons. These are not just numbers or cold statistics; they are human beings who will not have the opportunity of a future, and they are men, women and children whose lives, owing to the physical consequences they have suffered, can never be the same. In addition, they suffer from the repercussions of the attacks, such as collateral damage to critical infrastructure, which affects the delivery of services vital to the civilian population.

Uruguay reiterates its commitment to the Santiago Declaration, which it signed together with other Latin American and Caribbean countries and which recognizes the need to refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It also supports the adoption of an international political declaration on the subject, with a humanitarian focus that ensures the maximum possible protection for the civilian population.

My country further reaffirms its support for the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda, which is focused on disarmament and arms control, including the priority given to "disarmament that saves lives". That element, which relates to the reduction of conventional weapons such as missiles, shells, landmines, cluster munitions, improvised explosives and small arms and light weapons, relates directly to the protection of civilian populations.

Effective control of the arms trade is essential to ensuring the full application of international humanitarian law and mitigating the consequences of the use of

conventional weapons. For that reason, today we call once again on States that have not yet done so to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty.

Fifthly, in order to enhance the protection of civilians, effective use must be made of one of the most successful instruments for promoting international peace and security available to the United Nations: peacekeeping operations. The Council must prioritize the protection of civilians in the mandates of such operations, particularly during this pandemic.

Peacekeeping operations that have such protection-of-civilians mandates must continue to adapt to difficult environments by taking a comprehensive, integrated approach aimed at ensuring adequate protection for civilians. The Organization and its Member States have made, and continue to make, considerable efforts to improve the capacity of those operations. The recent report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, adopted by consensus (A/74/19); the revised policy of the Department of Peace Operations for the protection of civilians; and the new guidance in the form of *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook* are clear examples of the collective commitment to achieving greater effectiveness in terms of the protection of civilians.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, we would stress that peacekeeping operations must have the human, financial and equipment resources necessary to fully discharge the protection-of-civilians tasks entrusted to them. Furthermore, greater participation of women at all levels of peacekeeping missions is essential to improving the protection of civilians on the ground. Uruguay has taken substantive steps in that direction, guided by its own experience, which has demonstrated that female staff can establish closer relationships of trust with local communities, particularly women, children and other vulnerable groups.

Based on its strong commitment to peacekeeping operations, Uruguay has taken on, with pride and dedication, the task of protecting civilians in various parts of the world and assures the Organization and its Member States of its intention to continue and even to increase the contribution made by the Blue Helmets, especially in these extremely complex operational circumstances in which civilians may be even more unprotected.

Sixthly, and lastly, accountability for those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law is essential. My delegation agrees that this is one of the major outstanding challenges. Accountability is important not only because of its deterrent effect but also because it allows an end to the culture of impunity, which denies the right of victims to justice. In order to identify and punish the perpetrators, it is imperative first to collect and analyse comprehensive and reliable information and to conduct independent and impartial investigations.

States are primarily responsible for promoting the prosecution of perpetrators in national and international criminal justice systems. Uruguay calls on all States to ratify the Rome Statute and to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court, and it believes that the Council should refer cases to the Court where appropriate.

To conclude, as Secretary-General António Guterres has pointed out, the situation generated by COVID-19 is the worst crisis the world has faced since the Second World War. This very serious pandemic at the dawn of a new decade increases the challenges that civilians must face. However, fresh opportunities emerge from even the worst crises. Seventy-five years ago the Second World War gave rise to the creation of the Organization and a new international system of multilateral norms designed to guarantee the peace, security and prosperity of all nations. It also forged a universal conscience that led to the creation of the current human rights system.

Today we are facing a new global crisis of unprecedented magnitude in which all of our lives are at risk, one that only solidarity and a collective response will allow us to overcome. It is also within our power to muster the political will to make the changes necessary to advancing the implementation of this agenda.
