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Provisional

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield/Mr. Hunter (United States of America)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
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Gabon	Mr. Biang
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India	Mr. Tirumurti
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Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Roscoe

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict
(S/2022/381)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2022/381)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Morocco, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, Viet Nam and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; Mr. Robert Mardini, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross; Mr. David Miliband, President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee; and Ms. Rachel Boketa, Country Director of Women for Women International in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance

with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/381, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: Let me highlight some of the key concerns set out by the Secretary-General in his annual report (S/2022/381) on the protection of civilians, released last week. The report illustrates the grim reality that civilians continue to bear the brunt of suffering in situations of conflict.

First, and most fundamentally, conflict continued to cause widespread civilian deaths and injury last year. When hostilities took place in densely populated areas, the risks of death and injury for civilians rose sharply. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas, about 90 per cent of casualties were civilians, compared with 10 per cent in other areas. In Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere, improvised explosive devices, landmines and explosive remnants of war caused civilian deaths and injury and hindered access to farm land, essential services and livelihoods. Conflict damaged and eroded critical infrastructure, disrupting vital water, sanitation, electricity and health services. In Yemen, attacks damaged or destroyed schools, hospitals, telecommunications infrastructure, roads, factories, houses, cars and farms. And in Gaza, in the occupied Palestinian territory, fighting damaged wells, reservoirs, desalinization and waste-water plants and water-delivery networks and pumping stations, depriving people of access to clean drinking water.

Conflict also puts education at risk. Schools were relentlessly attacked, and hundreds of teachers killed, injured, kidnapped or assaulted. Conflicting parties attacked and occupied schools, depriving hundreds of thousands of children of learning and making them more vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups, exploitive labour and other dangers. In the first nine months of last year, more than 900 schools in Afghanistan were destroyed, damaged or closed, and their rehabilitation was hindered by explosive hazards. In Ethiopia, thousands of schools were entirely or partially damaged, and more than 30,000 teachers were displaced. And

conflict does not damage infrastructure alone. It damages the natural environment, not just through the fighting itself, but also through weak governance and neglect. In Syria, for instance, damage to industrial infrastructure generated millions of tons of rubble and dust containing hazardous material, such as asbestos, heavy metals, chemicals and combustion products, with a potentially serious impact on civilians' health.

We are all too familiar with the cycle of violence and displacement, and 2021 was no exception. By mid-year, fighting and insecurity had forcibly displaced 84 million people, with close to 51 million internally displaced. As the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported over the weekend, the war in Ukraine, and other conflicts, have now pushed the number of people forced to flee conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution to more than 100 million for the first time on record.

When civilians fled to safer areas, people with disabilities, including children and older people, were often left behind. Those who did manage to flee often lacked their assistive equipment and faced difficulty with mobility or were unable to access assistance. Conflict also takes a significant mental health toll. More than one in five people living in conflict-affected areas were estimated to suffer from depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Medical workers, facilities, equipment and transport continued to come under attack, while parties to conflict interfered with medical care. In northern Ethiopia, health-care facilities, equipment and transport were attacked and looted, and hospitals were used for military purposes. In Afghanistan, attacks on health-care facilities hampered access to health services for 300,000 people. In Yemen, only half of the health facilities were fully functioning, and those that remained often faced huge shortages of staff, medicine, fuel and medical supplies. Over and above conflict, the pandemic intensified human suffering and further strained and weakened health-care services. Nearly 3 billion people are still waiting for their first vaccination, many of them in conflict situations where health systems are weak and the level of public trust is low.

As we heard from the Secretary-General and others last week (see S/PV.9036), conflict-driven hunger has worsened. By the end of last year, conflict and insecurity were major drivers of crisis, with worse levels of acute

food insecurity for approximately 140 million people in 24 States. Thousands of people in Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen found themselves on the cusp of catastrophic food insecurity, primarily owing to armed conflict and violence. Parties to conflict made food insecurity worse by impeding food production, cutting access to food and destroying food sources. In northern Ethiopia, agricultural production was significantly hampered because people were displaced from their farms, crops were destroyed and livestock were looted or killed. In Yemen, farms, livestock, food storage facilities and other essential food production inputs and infrastructure were damaged. And in the Central African Republic, armed groups occupied fields and prevented access to crops and opportunities to harvest.

Humanitarian operations have also faced continued complex access challenges that deprived people of the assistance that they need to survive. In Somalia, fighting has impeded the movement of humanitarian personnel and supplies along main routes. In the Central African Republic, insecurity has forced non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to scale back or suspend their activities, and the increased use of explosive devices has hampered humanitarian movements and civilian access to assistance and services. Some fighting parties imposed severe limitations on humanitarian activities. Bureaucratic measures also slowed or stalled operations. In Myanmar, for instance, obstacles have included lengthy processes for approval of travel and difficulties registering organizations or obtaining visas for international staff. In some parts of the country, humanitarian access to people in need was blocked because of delayed or denied travel authorizations, roadblocks and checkpoints. The increased number of non-State armed groups in conflicts complicated humanitarian access negotiations, while the growing presence of private military and security contractors also created difficulties for humanitarians trying to reach people in need.

Sanctions and broadly conceived counter-terrorism measures impeded principled humanitarian activities. Misinformation and disinformation eroded trust, put humanitarians at risk of harm and ultimately jeopardized humanitarian operations. Social media facilitated the spread of harmful information influencing various audiences. In some cases, that information included false stories about humanitarian organizations, hampering their work. When humanitarian activities were

politicized, community acceptance was jeopardized. Humanitarian staff were intimidated, arrested or detained while carrying out their functions. For instance, staff from the NGO Médecins sans Frontières have been harassed and abused in Afghanistan, Iraq and Nigeria for allegedly supporting terrorists by providing impartial health care.

Humanitarian workers and assets also came under attack. Last year, some 143 security incidents against humanitarian workers were recorded in 14 countries and territories affected by conflict. They resulted in the deaths of 93 workers. National staff accounted for 98 per cent of the humanitarians killed, injured or kidnapped. This year looks no better.

The conflict in Ukraine has caused immense civilian suffering and loss. Since 24 February, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has recorded 8,089 civilian casualties in the country. Of that number, 3,811 were killed and 4,278 injured. Hospitals, schools, residential buildings and shelters have come under attack. Some 12 million Ukrainians have been forced from their homes. Civilians remain trapped and cut off from food, water and electricity. And the prospect of nuclear conflict, once unthinkable, is now back within the realm of possibility.

As we all know, the war has effectively ended Ukraine's food exports, and the humanitarian impacts are being felt far beyond its borders. Globally, food, fuel and fertilizer prices are skyrocketing. Price increases of up to 30 per cent for staple foods have threatened people in countries across Africa and the Middle East, including Cameroon, Libya, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen. That is hitting the poorest people the hardest, exacerbating suffering in other conflict situations and planting the seeds for further political instability and unrest worldwide.

As the Secretary-General has stated repeatedly, protecting civilians depends on full compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties. That entails many practical steps that States and non-State armed groups should take. I will mention a few here.

They should track reports of civilian harm to gauge the impact of military operations and shift course, if necessary. They should increase the understanding of the effects of conflict on the natural environment and integrate legal protection for the environment into military training, doctrine and policy and legal frameworks.

In operations involving a coalition with security partners and allies, including non-State armed groups, States should engage in political dialogue, training and joint operational planning and withhold arms transfers where there is a clear risk that the arms will be used to commit serious international humanitarian law violations. They should ensure that humanitarian operations are shielded from the political dynamics of conflict and support humanitarian engagement with all parties to conflict, including non-State armed groups. They should take steps to facilitate humanitarian activities and exclude humanitarian and medical activities from the scope of counter-terrorism and sanctions measures. They should investigate alleged war crimes, prosecute perpetrators, ensure reparations for victims and strengthen other States' capacity and resources to investigate and prosecute.

Finally, States should develop policy frameworks and build upon those good policies and practices. Parties to conflict and States must apply much greater political will and commitment in order to respect the rules of war and implement good policies and practices.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Mardini.

Mr. Mardini: On behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), I am pleased and honoured to brief the Security Council on what we see as some of the most pressing protection challenges today. My thanks go to the United States for the invitation.

Let me be honest: I come here with a certain sense of *déjà vu*. The ICRC has briefed the Council for many years. Our concerns and asks may have varied somewhat, but the central theme has been much the same — how best to respond to the terrible suffering we witness day in and day out in armed conflicts around the world and how to prevent it from happening in the first place.

This year is no different. While certain progress has been made on the normative and policy fronts on the issue of the protection of civilians, for the most part, the reality on the ground continues to tell a very different story. We see deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian objects, causing untold suffering. We see indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks all too frequently. We see the blatant politicization of humanitarian action, while political solutions to end conflict remain elusive. We

see States that have the primary responsibility for respecting, and ensuring respect for, international humanitarian law falling short.

At the same time, I come here today with an unwavering sense of hope — hope in our common humanity; hope that things can and will improve and that the words spoken in the Council will translate into a meaningful reality for the millions of women, men and children suffering the horrors of armed conflict. With that in mind, I would like to highlight three issues that we find to be of particular concern — all of them interconnected — with clear asks aimed at improving the situation on the ground.

The first is the appalling human cost of war in cities. This certainly is not the first time the ICRC has highlighted that concern in the Security Council, and I dare say it will not be the last. I hardly need remind members of the massive harm urban warfare causes, primarily to civilians, and all the more so when explosive weapons with wide-area effects are used. All of us have seen it on our screens, if not on the actual front lines — countless people killed or gravely wounded, homes and vital infrastructure destroyed, hospitals faced with multiple casualties and complex injuries quickly overwhelming emergency rooms, survivors left with lifelong disabilities or severe psychological trauma.

That clearly raises serious questions about how parties to such conflicts interpret and apply the relevant tools of international humanitarian law. Indeed, the concept of military necessity is abused more often than not. It is used as an excuse for the use of force rather than a reason to limit it. The risks often increase when weapons are supplied to belligerents by allies or partners without proper oversight. We once again urge States and parties to armed conflict to avoid the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas due to the high risk of indiscriminate effects. We urge them to take preventive and mitigation measures at all levels to that effect to strengthen the protection of civilians and facilitate respect for international humanitarian law.

More broadly, we ask States, including Council members, to ensure that the protection of civilians is a strategic priority in the planning and conduct of all military and security operations in populated areas. That includes allowing civilians to receive humanitarian assistance, sparing them from attacks and facilitating their safe passage to obtain respite from violence.

Civilian infrastructure, allowing for the provision of essential services to the civilian population, must be protected, as unanimously endorsed in resolution 2573 (2021). That also includes leveraging the influence of Council members and special relationships with allies, partners and proxies to foster respect for the law, while focusing squarely on ensuring better protection outcomes for civilians and others not fighting.

The second issue of particular concern is the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech during armed conflict. We see at first-hand in our operations how that phenomenon reduces the ability of affected people to make well-informed decisions that impact their safety and dignity. It dangerously distorts information that is vital to human needs, such as access to safety, shelter and health care.

We are also seeing the surge in misinformation, online and offline, which jeopardizes humanitarian efforts to earn the trust and acceptance of affected people. False narratives around the role of humanitarian organizations not only hamper our work but can create dangers for the people we try to protect and assist and for our own staff. In that regard too, States have an essential role to play, both in preventing misinformation and disinformation and mitigating their impact on the people affected. Armed conflicts are precisely where the risks are highest and the safeguards lowest. We therefore urge States and parties to conflicts to ensure that at the very least their own activities and information campaigns are not part of the problem, that they put the protection of civilians at the centre of their efforts and that they do not compromise or endanger the humanitarian space.

My third and final concern relates to the increasing pressure on front-line humanitarian organizations to help States obtain information for eventual criminal proceedings in armed conflict. Of course, improving respect for international humanitarian law requires accountability, and accountability in turn helps to prevent violations of international humanitarian law, which is in all our interests. But we need to separate the work of humanitarian organizations from that of investigative bodies. That is critical if we are to preserve neutrality and impartiality and the ability to access populations in need. For those reasons, we urge States to refrain from making operational humanitarian organizations such as ours responsible for sharing data from international humanitarian law monitoring.

Improving compliance with international humanitarian law, which is at the heart of our mandate, includes helping Governments meet their responsibilities by adopting legislation and training their armed forces and police. It includes engaging in constructive dialogue with the parties based on our observations on the ground. It can also include providing technical assistance and practical guidance on domestic legislation that serves as a basis for investigations and help ensure it is effective. We respectfully ask that States take that wider view in their pursuit of accountability in the context of armed conflicts, in order to allow and facilitate organizations to work according to their particular mandates.

In conclusion, the gap between the ever-growing protection and assistance needs of conflict-affected people and the ability of humanitarian organizations to deliver an adequate response is still far too wide. We need to bridge that gap. That means removing obstacles such as restrictive measures that criminalize aid and deny access, politicize funding or impose requirements compromising our humanitarian principles. And we should be clear that the responsibility for removing those obstacles, for ensuring protection, lies first and foremost with States, including the members of the Security Council.

To that end, the ICRC urges States to take decisive action in the three areas that I highlighted — making the protection of civilians a strategic priority in the planning and conduct of all military and security operations in populated areas, which includes avoiding the use of heavy explosive weapons; working to avoid and prevent the spread of misinformation and disinformation in armed conflicts and mitigate their impact on affected people; and ensuring accountability for victims without compromising the neutral and humanitarian space that humanitarian organizations need to operate in. Action in those three areas would go a long way to ensuring better protection of civilians in armed conflicts everywhere. And it might just mean that next year, in this same briefing, we have something to celebrate.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Miliband.

Mr. Miliband: It is an honour to be with the Security Council today to speak as a fact witness on behalf of the 30,000 staff and volunteers of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) who served more than 35 million

civilians at 200 field sites in conflict zones around the world last year. The demand that both our staff and clients share is not for new rights or new laws, but for the Council to fulfil the commitments it has made and allow them to enjoy the civilian protections they have been repeatedly promised.

The Security Council has said many times that the protection of civilians is its business. Countless resolutions have promised to fulfil commitments under international humanitarian law. Yet there are 56 active conflicts in the world today. As Mr. Rajasingham said, civilians account for nearly 90 per cent of the casualties of war, and we learned this week of the more than 100 million people who have been forced to flee their homes by conflict and disaster. So the system for protecting civilians — diplomatic, political, legal, humanitarian — is not succeeding but failing. And no failure is greater than the denial of access for innocent civilians to the legal right to receive life-saving aid. So the focus that you have chosen for this debate, Madam President, could not be more important.

Every year the delivery of aid becomes harder in conflict zones, not because the natural geography is more difficult but because the human-made obstacles are more significant. IRC and other humanitarian staff are kidnapped at checkpoints, shot at by armed groups, threatened with arrest if they provide life-saving aid to what is termed the enemy. And that is before the bureaucracy, the endless waiting for permissions, for visas, for documentation, for cash delivery — delays designed to frustrate, not deliver. According to the Assessment Capacities Project, ACAPS, nearly 200 million people in humanitarian need — 70 per cent of the total — are living in countries with very high or extreme humanitarian access constraints.

That is not the collateral damage of conflict. It is not a stray bullet or a military mistake. It is often part of a war strategy, one that directly violates the laws of war. And while this is tragic, it needs to be said that it is not just a strategy on the part of non-State actors but also of States Members of the United Nations. And those who complain, or expose, or campaign against it — whether they are United Nations officials or non-governmental organizations or political opposition — are often targeted for retribution. The Ukraine crisis is obviously the capstone of this age of impunity, but it is not the exception. Just last week two IRC vehicles were attacked in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, leaving one

medical staff member in hospital with gunshot wounds and others kidnapped.

The Council is not responsible for the tactics of those laying siege to communities or targeting civilians or aid workers. However, it is responsible for the failure to hold those actors to account and curb their illegal excesses. That is what needs to change. We know what is needed to turn back the age of impunity — the countervailing power of transparency, of monitoring, of contact groups, of accountability and of justice. We have seen the effects of those measures, and that is what we call for today, new muscle in the drive to prevent the strangulation and weaponization of aid. We do not call for new rights. We call for new determination to uphold existing rights.

First, humanitarian access and its denial should be a permanent agenda item for the Council, because that denial is a threat to regional peace and security. When reports are issued and benchmarks set, they must be followed up. When progress stalls or commitments are abandoned, they should be called out.

Secondly, United Nations officials have a critical role to play, from the Secretary-General on down. Their bravery and their voices should be lauded, not muffled. The Security Council should set a standard for defending United Nations officials who call out violations of international law.

Thirdly, those officials should be backed by independent assessments of access violations that leave no room for political pressure to squeeze out plain speaking. In its watch list, published in December last year, the International Rescue Committee proposed an independent office for the promotion of humanitarian access to promote precisely such an independent assessment. The European Union has proposed driving independent data collection and reporting by funding those efforts and ensuring the independence of the body doing it. We hope that Member States will commit to using that data to drive accountability.

Fourthly, early-warning mechanisms cannot be allowed to gather dust. Resolution 2417 (2018), on conflict-induced hunger, could be an effective indicator of food insecurity and famine and a tool to fight it, but it is undermined by weak and inconsistent implementation, data and reporting. That needs to change.

Lastly, where the Council has direct power over access to aid, such as in the upcoming vote to renew

cross-border access to Syria, that vote should be based on facts and law alone to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need by the most direct and effective routes.

We live in the real world. We see the constraints around the often-divided Security Council, as well as in the conflict zones where we work. But we also look to the wider international community to help break the deadlock.

When the Security Council is divided, the General Assembly can continue to play a critical role in establishing independent mechanisms to gather evidence on international humanitarian law violations. Where humanitarian work needs guarding from the politics of Member States, the General Assembly can establish independent panels and fact-finding missions and deliver transparent reporting on barriers imposed on humanitarian action in conflict settings. Public and unequivocal documentation of the current state of humanitarian access is the first step towards accountability and diplomacy for renewed access.

The United Nations reflects all the complexities of international relations, but also the inspiration of humanitarian values. We hope that this debate shines a light on the gap between the two and leads to renewed effort to live up to the better angels of our nature and, frankly, the better angels that helped to found this body.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Boketa.

Ms. Boketa: I thank the United States Mission for the opportunity today to share our experience of ongoing conflict and crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It might seem obvious, but to protect civilians in armed conflict and ensure better humanitarian access, it is vital to first listen to those of us from conflict-affected countries. I am a national of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I therefore know first-hand the challenges facing my country in general and in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where I work.

To refresh a little regarding the context, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is currently home to more than 5.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), which is one of the largest IDP populations in the world. Overall, 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, and 27 million Congolese

are highly food insecure, that is, more than one in four people in the country. Global inflation and food shortages caused by the war in Ukraine are making a bad situation even worse. Furthermore, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is currently ranked 163 out of 170 countries in the recently released global *Women, Peace and Security Index*, which means that, on top of the other challenges, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is also one of the most difficult places in the world to be a woman.

At Women for Women International, we help women survivors of war to rebuild their lives. Our programmes are locally led and rooted in the communities that we serve. To ensure better humanitarian access and to better protect all civilians, we believe that gender-transformative approaches and local women's organizations must be part of the strategy from the start.

Women are uniquely and disproportionately affected by the cycles of poverty and displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as are other marginalized populations, such as children, indigenous people, people with disabilities and the elderly. The path to gender equality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo indicates that not only are women plagued by the context of insecurity and conflict, but they also face harmful, patriarchal social norms and beliefs, which hinder their access to basic social services and humanitarian aid and create barriers when they try to challenge those circumstances. Those compounding challenges also render women and marginalized groups the most likely to fall between the gaps of the humanitarian and protection, development and peacebuilding nexus.

At Women for Women International, I work with women living in communities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those women may have been displaced three or four times by the time they settle there — and, believe me, choosing to settle in such areas is not risk-free. The illegal exploitation of natural resources and mining conflicts often translate into armed violence that blocks roads and humanitarian access points. We therefore have to be creative and adaptive in order to provide consistent services to women, deliver stipends and maintain our training programmes.

The women in our programmes not only develop vocational training skills and start their own businesses, but they also learn about savings, the link between

nutrition and health and their rights. Their savings and additional income offer them resilience and a buffer between crisis and total destitution. But, with the coronavirus disease, the war in Ukraine and rising food and fuel prices, that buffer for women is slowly eroding.

We stand in solidarity, and share a hope for peace, with all Ukrainians, because we know that the effects of war, conflict and disasters near and far are often borne by the most vulnerable and the most marginalized. It is community-based and women-centred organizations that are the first on the front line to provide them with immediate support and to prevent a rollback on the progress that women have made in their savings and resilience, as well as in their dignity and status.

I will give an example of one of our programme graduates, Solange, who was raped four times over two decades of war. She saw her husband and their three children being tortured and killed. It was after her fourth rape resulted in a pregnancy that she left her village, searching for a new start for her and her newborn daughter. Despite the self-sufficiency gained from the training that we provided to her, society still mocked her and isolated her as a victim of rape due to her visible scars from the beatings she endured. It is because of the good friends she met in her group training sessions and the trust built among participants and trainers alike that she says that we all accept each other, without discrimination, and her invisible scars can begin to heal.

A woman such as Solange is just one example of the many who might fall between the gaps of community services due to stigma and isolation. If the goal of humanitarian aid and access is to reduce harm to all civilians affected by conflict and war, in order to reach Solange gender-transformative approaches and local women's organizations must be part of the protection and humanitarian strategy.

Such approaches would not just recognize and account for the unique impacts and challenges to humanitarian access posed by women's vulnerabilities. Gender transformative means that the decision-making and planning processes at all levels would appropriately value and recognize the resourcefulness and capabilities of women in civil society as leaders.

We see year after year that, when we can build women's power and resilience through our programmes, they are able to pay it forward to other women, the community and the next generation.

There are women like Cinama, who saw her mother struggle to raise her seven children on barely one meal a day, because, as a widow, she had no rights to land or inheritance, leaving the entire family vulnerable to each new wave of conflict and crisis. Now 26 years old, Cinama built her self-reliance through our training programme to become a brickmaker. Today, as a vocational trainer herself, Cinama passes along those same skills to other women in her community, and she owns her land. She is leaving a legacy to the next generation that she hopes will outlast the wars that have marked the milestones of her own life.

During crisis, people affected by disasters and conflict look to their national and local authorities, the United Nations and the broader humanitarian community to support and strengthen their protection from those threats. Protecting them is therefore a primary responsibility of the duty-bearers. In order to fulfil the great responsibility of ensuring humanitarian access and protecting civilians, there must be closer coordination among the humanitarian country teams, Government authorities, peacekeeping missions like the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and civil society across the planning and implementation phases of humanitarian response.

Civil society organizations — and especially women's civil society — need additional, flexible financial resources, human resources and capacity. The inclusion of civil society organizations that are already providing aid and services is key to ensuring humanitarian access for displaced people and for marginalized, vulnerable populations in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The lives of those civilians and of women like Solange and Cinama do not fall neatly into the buckets of different sectors or agendas, or even frameworks. So, to ensure their protection, I ask that the global humanitarian community and Member States think and act holistically, locally and transformatively in order to meet them where they are — because every crisis is a protection crisis.

The President: I thank Ms. Boketa for her briefing.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

Let me start by thanking Director Rajasingham and Director-General Mardini for their briefings today. I also express my deep appreciation to our civil society speaker, Ms. Rachel Boketa, from Women for Women International, and Mr. David Miliband, from the International Rescue Committee. I thank Mr. Miliband for his clear and practical list of solutions for providing much-needed humanitarian access, and I thank Ms. Boketa for raising the different ways in which women, girls, men and boys are harmed when humanitarian access is impeded — an issue that is too often ignored. I very much appreciate her sharing the real-life stories of Solange and Cinama and the impact that her programmes are having on their lives. I also want to thank Mr. Mardini for sharing the perspectives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and his recommendations to the Council. The United States greatly appreciates all the work that the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations carry out on the ground in order to protect civilians in armed conflicts. They know that they are all life-savers, and we appreciate them.

We hear new reports of civilians under threat every single day. The reports come from every corner of the globe — from a musician in Mali who, earlier this week, told *The Washington Post* about the slaughter of at least 300 civilians by the Russian-backed Wagner Group; to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who, on Monday, told the world that, for the first time, more than 100 million people have been forcibly displaced.

To make matters worse, killings, forced displacements and lack of humanitarian access often come together and create a downward spiral. As just one horrific example of that, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 5.6 million Congolese remain displaced. Ms. Boketa reported an even higher number and stressed that that is one of the largest displaced populations in the world.

The ceaseless fighting has severely limited humanitarian access. Over 10 months in 2021, at least 260 separate incidents directly affected humanitarian workers or supplies. Nearly 60 workers were killed, injured or kidnapped during that period. Similarly, humanitarian workers were attacked in South Sudan,

when three aid workers were killed on 24 March as part of a World Food Programme convoy. The killings make it harder to deliver humanitarian aid, and the lack of aid makes it more likely that civilians will remain displaced.

The result of that vicious cycle is what we see in Syria, where, after 11 years of the Al-Assad regime's brutal war, 14 million Syrians rely on humanitarian assistance and 6.6 million Syrian remain internally displaced. Every month, Syrian civilians are attacked and killed by the Al-Assad regime and others, and hospitals often do not have the medicine or supplies to help the injured because humanitarian convoys are not able to reach them.

The people of Ukraine are also in need of dire humanitarian assistance, as countless civilians continue to be injured or killed by Russia's brutal war of choice. We have seen images of mass graves. We have seen images of destroyed buildings. We have seen credible reports of individuals executed, bodies showing signs of torture and horrific accounts of sexual violence against women and girls, as well as boys and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons. This month, the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine announced that it has evidence of at least 300 unlawful killings of civilians, including children, since Russian forces withdrew from areas north of Kyiv. Yesterday we saw credible media reports of Russian forces stealing grain from Ukraine, as this war has exacerbated a global food security crisis. The impact has been particularly devastating on children, in the region and across the world.

For those reasons, we call on the Secretary-General to add Ukraine as a situation of concern in the upcoming annual report on children and armed conflict. There will be justice, and Russia will be held accountable for those atrocities.

Our charge — to maintain international peace and security — means that we have an obligation to address all those threats to civilians in armed conflict. States and non-State parties to conflict have obligations with regard to respecting human rights and protecting civilians, including humanitarian workers, as well as equipment and goods that are not for military purposes.

But, as the Security Council, we also have a duty to do whatever is in our power to protect civilians caught in the throes of conflict. Perhaps the most immediate, powerful and practical way we can do so is by providing and safeguarding humanitarian access. After all, we can

raise all the funds and donate all the food and medical supplies in the world, but it will not matter if it does not get to those in need.

The Security Council has the power to forge paths for humanitarian access where it is most desperately needed. We did this last year when we unanimously voted to renew the mandate for United Nations cross-border assistance in Syria (resolution 2585 (2021)). That was an important, life-saving decision for millions of people. It demonstrated the best of what we can do when we work together.

But now, in 2022, the United Nations estimates that 14.6 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance — a nearly 10 per cent increase over last year. We therefore have to renew the mandate again, and we have to expand it and increase the number of crossing points to meet the rising demands for humanitarian aid in Syria. I look forward to travelling to Bab Al-Hawa crossing soon and seeing the current needs on the ground with my own eyes.

This year's report (S/2022/381) shines a spotlight on another critical impediment to the protection of civilians: disinformation. For example, in the Central African Republic and Mali, disinformation targeting the United Nations has seriously threatened peacekeepers' safety and security and undermined the ability of the United Nations to reach civilians and protect them. We must ensure that the United Nations has the capabilities it needs to counter disinformation that impedes the work that it has been charged to do.

Every year, this annual debate is sobering, but this year it is especially so. Fortunately, the steps are clear. As our briefers outlined, there are practical steps we can take right now to protect civilians. We know exactly how we can provide humanitarian access and break the cycle of despair. So let us just get it done.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Director Ramesh Rajasingham, Director-General Robert Mardini, President David Miliband and Director Rachel Boketa for their inspiring briefings.

There is only one effective way to protect civilians in armed conflict, and that is not to engage in or incite armed conflict. And if armed conflict does occur, we must mobilize to stop it immediately. And, as long as a war has not been started, it must be prevented

by attacking the well-known roots that could lead to its outbreak.

This effective means of sparing civilians from the scourge of war, of saving them from fear or indignity, is engraved in indelible ink in every provision of the United Nations Charter. It is the matrix vocation of the United Nations and the *raison d'être* of the Security Council.

It is obvious that the Council will be judged faithful to its mandate if it effectively protects civilian populations everywhere in the world from the scourge of war. In contrast, the Council will have failed in its mission as long as civilian populations are victims of hostilities. The Council falls short when its response to civilian casualties is rhetoric or fragmentation tied to geopolitical or geostrategic interests and influence.

There are too many wars in the world. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, there are about 50 wars involving States and more than a hundred involving armed groups. Each of these wars results in the death of civilians and leaves the survivors maimed, tortured, raped, forcibly displaced or suffering serious violations of their fundamental rights. In each case, women and children pay the highest price in blood, fear and indignity.

Africa remains the region of the world most affected by armed conflict. In the trenches and refugee camps of a dozen countries of the African continent, Africa Day, which we celebrate today, will be marked by the same distress and terror as any other day.

If we cannot contain or prevent wars, we must be able to limit their effects on those who do not take part in the hostilities and prevent attacks, bombings and the targeting of populations. This, of course, requires strict adherence by belligerent parties to the five fundamental principles of international humanitarian law: humanity, distinction, precaution, proportionality, and the prohibition of unnecessary suffering and harm.

To be lax in the application of international humanitarian law is to inflict double punishment on civilian populations. The moving testimony that Ms. Boketa has just shared with us certainly reminds us of our humanity. But above all, it must activate our thirst for action.

Protecting civilians is the responsibility of every member of the international community and a requirement for every member of the Security Council. We must do so boldly, to the extent prescribed by the

normative instruments at our disposal — among them resolution 1674 (2006) on the responsibility to protect, resolution 1738 (2006) on the protection of civilians in times of conflict, which condemns attacks against journalists, and resolutions 2467 (2019), 2427 (2018) and 1325 (2000), which guarantee the protection of specific groups, children and women — in order to ensure their implementation in times of war.

The conflicts of our time are essentially internal and urban and therefore constitute factors of fragility in civilian populations, which suffer both from the direct effects of the conflicts and from their indirect effects resulting from the destruction of civilian infrastructure used for production or transformation or distribution of public services. Not only do these attacks undermine the capacity of States to protect civilian populations, but they also have a significant and lasting impact on the State's ability to recover and rebuild, resulting in the need to ensure unhindered humanitarian access, the protection of humanitarian personnel and the securing of refugee camps. We deplore and condemn in the strongest terms the recent attacks on humanitarian workers in Yemen, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, and reiterate our commitment to respect for international humanitarian law, which is essential to ensure safe access for humanitarian assistance to populations in distress.

People who are not taking part in the fighting or who, because of their condition, can no longer take part in it, should not be the targets of armed attacks. However, it has become very common for heavy artillery, shelling and such indiscriminate weapons as cluster munitions and other explosives to be targeted directly at civilians or civilian infrastructure. The effects of such weapons are disproportionate and can extend beyond the period of conflict and beyond the protocols of specialized United Nations agencies and entities. The ban on the use of weapons of mass destruction must be respected by all.

Another area where civilians must be protected is in the area of human rights abuses. From rape, sexual and gender-based violence, to trafficking of all kinds, networks of traffickers find civilians fleeing the battlefields, especially women and children, to be the easiest prey because they are exposed and fragile, without resources or protection. In this regard, again, we have an obligation to fulfil our commitments and ensure compliance with international conventions and Security Council resolutions.

We must be uncompromising in the context of armed conflict in order to prevent the use of civilians and civilian infrastructures for military purposes. Our mobilization must be unwavering in the face of increasingly recurrent attacks against humanitarian personnel and journalists, as well as violations of the right to information. Similarly, the international community must also ensure that civilians' digital data is protected and that their rights continue to be respected in situations of armed conflict. This is particularly relevant for displaced civilians who, in some cases, may be exposed to retaliation because of their ethnicity or religion or for any other reason.

Urgent, coordinated and targeted actions must be taken to strengthen the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilian populations, all within a framework of new funding schemes that can accommodate both short-term and long-term actions, as well as individual and systemic approaches. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work here, and humanitarian preparedness must therefore be adapted to respond to specific situations.

It is crucial to ensure that impunity for attacks on civilians is stamped out. The perpetrators of war crimes and other violations of the laws of war must be brought to account and held responsible for their actions. And independent, impartial and free investigations must of course be conducted in order to establish the facts and attribute responsibilities.

In conclusion, I would like to express my country's rejection of all forms of war, as well as to underscore our commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. We must redouble our efforts to exorcise the logic of war and reconnect the Council with the goal of protecting civilians from war.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): At the outset, let me thank you, Madam President, for convening this annual open debate today on the important theme of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. I would also like to thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Robert Mardini; Mr. David Miliband, President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee; and Ms. Rachel Boketa, Country Director of Women for Women International in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for their remarks.

We are witnessing a resurgence in armed conflicts around the globe. They have further compounded the effects of pressing challenges such as the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic, climate change and food security, driving millions towards a dire humanitarian situation. The humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts are severe. We are witnessing the debilitating effect that conflicts have on the issue of access to humanitarian aid, whether in Afghanistan, Yemen, Mali, the Sudan or Ukraine. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381) paints a distressing picture of civilian suffering. There were more than 11,000 civilian casualties in various conflicts in 2021, more than 45 per cent of them in Afghanistan; 140 million people were left reeling from conflict-induced hunger; and 84 million were forcibly displaced, with women and children forming a large majority of the internally displaced.

It is very worrying that parties to armed conflicts seem to consider civilian populations and civilian infrastructure to be legitimate targets. Vulnerable groups, including women, children and minorities, as well as essential civilian infrastructure, hospitals and irreplaceable cultural heritage, have been among the first casualties of attacks in recent armed conflicts. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has resulted in the loss of lives and countless miseries for its people, particularly women, children and the elderly, with millions becoming homeless and forced to take shelter in neighbouring countries. Since the conflict in Ukraine began, India has consistently called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and an end to the violence. We have emphasized the importance of pursuing a path of dialogue and diplomacy as the only way out.

The primary responsibility for ensuring the safety and security of populations, including the maintenance of essential services, rests with national Governments. However, we have in place international principles and jurisprudence that lay just as much responsibility on the parties to conflicts for ensuring that civilians and civilian infrastructure are not targeted in such situations. Civilians in conflict-affected areas need safe, unhindered, rapid access to basic services, which are often provided by humanitarian workers. We note with concern the spike in attacks on humanitarian teams and the increasing obstacles they face as they respond to conflict-ravaged communities. As we have reiterated in the Council, all humanitarian aid and assistance must be primarily guided by the universal principles

of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Those measures must not be politicized.

Terrorism today is the greatest threat facing humankind. It exacerbates social tensions and pushes societies towards instability and violence. Any debate on the protection of civilians would therefore be incomplete without taking into account the carnage wrought by terrorist forces, particularly those backed by State actors pursuing political objectives. Having for decades suffered the scourge of cross-border terrorism in which thousands of innocent civilians have lost their lives, India has always been at the forefront of global counter-terrorism efforts. The international community should stand firm in its opposition to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reject any attempt to provide any justification for terrorist acts. We should remember that the consequences of any relaxation of our guard on that count would be borne not only by civilians but by our security forces, who take on terrorists in extremely difficult conditions in urban areas.

I would like to urge the Council to focus on another key issue, the increasing challenges faced by peacekeepers in United Nations missions around the world in executing their mandate to protect civilians. The protection of civilians is primarily the responsibility of host Governments, an established operating principle in the United Nations peacekeeping architecture. The role of United Nations peacekeeping operations is to supplement national efforts to advance peace and security. Peacekeepers cannot and should not be a substitute for the primary responsibility of protecting civilians, which rests primarily with host Governments.

In cumulative terms, India has contributed the world's highest number of troops to peacekeeping operations. Our troops and police personnel have been at the forefront of translating the Council's words into action on the ground across several peacekeeping missions. They were protecting civilians long before the term came into common usage in the Council. We have provided a cutting edge in many United Nations operations where civilians were under threat. India therefore brings to the table a certain quantity and quality of experience in protecting civilians in peacekeeping missions that is unique in its relevance, variety and depth.

We need to ensure that United Nations peacekeepers are adequately equipped and trained to take up the tasks involved in protecting civilians, especially by

leveraging cutting-edge technologies. Moreover, with the increasingly multidimensional nature of peacekeeping missions, there is a risk of diluting the focus on protection-of-civilians mandates. We need to simplify peacekeeping mandates. Peacebuilding activities such as the promotion of human rights, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and electoral assistance should be suitably separated from peacekeeping missions. We should resist the temptation to add even more to peacekeeping mandates, or we may see civilian and peacekeeping casualties increase, which should be avoided at all costs.

Finally, while it is important to deliberate on the devastating consequences of armed conflict on civilians, we should not ignore the fundamental issues and international power politics that exacerbate armed conflicts. Today we should reaffirm our commitment to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States. We should also reaffirm that the contemporary global order has been built on the Charter of the United Nations, international law and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to express our condolences to you, Madam President, as well as the Permanent Mission of United States and the entire American people, for the horrendous crime that occurred yesterday in Texas, in which innocent people, most of them children, were killed, as well as for the recent hate crime incident that preceded it. Unfortunately, that also pertains to the protection of civilians, even if not in the context of armed conflict.

We welcome our briefers to the traditional May debate on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Last year, the Security Council adopted two important resolutions, resolution 2573 (2021), on the protection of civilian infrastructure and installations, and resolution 2601 (2021), on the protection of schools and education in armed conflict. The international community continues to expand its arsenal of international instruments to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

The annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381) provides a holistic picture of the situation of civilians in armed conflict. It is encouraging that the situation in Afghanistan has started to improve since the withdrawal of United States troops from

Afghanistan last summer. Unfortunately, the first half of 2021, during which time American troops remained in Afghanistan, saw the tragic record of more than 5,000 Afghans killed and wounded. The report also rightly notes the high number of civilian casualties in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Syria.

Concerning Syria, despite significant progress in combating international terrorism, fully achieving peace and stability in the country is being hindered by the illegal United States occupation of large parts of the State's territory. In the occupied territories, camps with inhumane living conditions continue to operate, and havoc and lawlessness continue to reign.

In addition, the occupying Power has egregiously plundered natural and agricultural resources belonging to the people of Syria. The United States is stepping up its activities involving smuggling and trafficking in oil and grain. We suppose that is the American way of dealing with the global energy and food crisis. Moreover, despite the protracted grave humanitarian situation in Syria, together with the economic crisis, the United States and the European Union continue to impose illegal unilateral sanctions against the long-suffering people of Syria, which are having disastrous consequences.

Modern international humanitarian law is a code of responsible behaviour between warring parties, which was hard-won as a result of the two World Wars. Russia stood at the origins of this category of international law and strictly abides by its principles. In contrast to the methods of extermination of the adversary and the civilian population used during NATO's combat operations in Yugoslavia, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, Russia's current special military operation in Ukraine fully adheres to the noble goal of protecting the lives of civilians, who have been held hostage by the Kyiv regime.

The special operation has clearly highlighted how cynical and criminal the actions of the representatives of the Kyiv authorities and their armed forces, especially the nationalist formations, can be. The Russian authorities and reputable non-governmental organizations are carefully documenting Kyiv's crimes. It is only a matter of time before it is held accountable.

At the same time, the United States of America and its allies are not only turning a blind eye to Kyiv's crimes against civilians, but are also complicit in the killing of civilians. The shelling of peaceful towns in

Donbas is being carried out with howitzers supplied by Washington. The Ukrainian armed forces regularly set up gun posts in schools and hospitals — for example, the Lisichansk general hospital, in which machine-gun crews were positioned on the second and third floors; the Kharkiv oblast regional children's hospital, in which machine gunners from the Ukrainian armed forces have positioned themselves; the Kharkiv municipal hospital No. 3; and the Volnovakha central hospital. That is by no means an exhaustive list. The shelling of civilians by Ukrainian armed forces is taking place on a daily basis; many witnesses can attest to that. The way in which the Ukrainian military treat their compatriots is simply bewildering.

As we are talking on the issue of the protection of civilians, we would be remiss were we not to mention the exploitation and manipulation of public opinion centred upon it. We regularly expound on these issues in our statements. The most glaring example of that involves the blatant Ukrainian provocation in Bucha, which was bandied about by the international media in early April.

Two days ago, at the Security Council meeting devoted to information technology (see S/PV.9039), the representative of the United Kingdom attempted to cast doubt on our conclusions concerning the staged nature of the Bucha provocation by referring to satellite images published by *The New York Times*. If we are to believe them, there were allegedly bodies on the streets of Bucha that could be seen from satellites as early as 11 March.

I will not broach the dubious character of the images themselves. We have not had the opportunity to verify their authenticity because Maxar, the satellite company that produced them, does not sell its products to Russia. If we assume that the photos are authentic and that the bodies that Ukrainian correspondents photographed in the streets of Bucha on 3 April had indeed been lying there since 11 March, the question arises: why in the April photos are there no signs of decomposition or impurities? According to weather reports, the temperature in the city at that time reached 16°C. Any — even an inexperienced — forensic pathologist will acknowledge that, by the end of the second week, a corpse is not only visibly decomposed; it turns almost black. The bodies shown to everyone by the Ukrainians show no signs of decomposition, which means that the assertions by the *The New York Times* are false.

Our British colleagues said a great deal more in their statement. We will respond to them in detail in the near future, including on social media. I would just like to note that the obvious inconsistencies concerning the Ukrainian provocation in Bucha are being challenged by the United Kingdom, which during its presidency of the Security Council twice refused to convene the meeting requested precisely to discuss that provocation.

Moreover, it is remarkable that our Western colleagues rapidly cooled to the idea of expounding on the provocation in Kramatorsk, where more than 50 civilians were killed after the Ukrainian military shelled the railway station on 8 April. That false-flag operation by Ukraine was apparently too clumsily executed, which made the responsibility of the Ukrainian side far too obvious.

I would also like to draw attention to the torture and abuse of Russian prisoners of war by Ukrainian nationalists and the Ukrainian armed forces. Many Ukrainian armed forces who have been captured have confessed that they had orders to shoot civilians and not to take Russian soldiers prisoner. Conversely, the humane treatment of prisoners of war is the norm for the Russian armed forces, which is attested to by the recent treatment of the Ukrainian armed forces soldiers and Ukrainian nationalists of the notorious Azov Regiment who surrendered and left the Azovstal plant. As we all know, 2,439 people from various Ukrainian units surrendered. All of the servicemen and their commanders were treated with respect, and medical assistance was provided to the wounded. They and their relatives, whom we are allowing them to contact, have themselves confirmed that.

Such treatment is also given, among others, to fighters who have besmirched themselves by committing the most heinous war crimes. All those responsible for deliberately targeting civilians or killing them as a result of the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in violation of international humanitarian law will be brought to justice.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): At the outset, I would like to thank the United States delegation for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also thank Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for his insightful briefing and welcome the additional perspectives provided by Robert Mardini, Director-General of the International

Committee of the Red Cross, David Miliband, President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee, and Rachel Boketa, Country Director of Women for Women International in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While conflicts and wars may be inevitable realities of human history, every civilization and generation has a responsibility for protecting civilians from the cruel consequences of armed conflict. Throughout our past, and despite the fervent efforts made to limit the impact of war on civilians, the world, regrettably, continues to witness egregious violations of the rights of civilian populations in many situations of conflict across several parts of the world, as we clearly heard both from our briefers and from other delegations this morning.

The cost of the proliferation of conflicts is today reflected in the many civilian deaths and injuries that are being recorded; the displacement of millions of people; the life of indignity they are forced to live; the starvation and hunger that the destruction of their livelihoods bring about; the psychological trauma that many young girls, women and boys face as a result of conflict-related sexual violence; the deliberate targeting of civilians as a strategy of war; and the destruction of critical life-supporting infrastructure that makes any effort at reconstructing societies an almost-distant dream.

Amid these ignoble situations that conflicts create, in recent years we have also had to contend with the exacerbating effects of climate change and the coronavirus disease pandemic, which have worsened the vulnerabilities of civilian populations in conflict settings and made their protection even more challenging. It is therefore distressing to witness the hostile environments deliberately created by parties to conflicts and armed combatants in order to prevent humanitarian personnel from effectively carrying out their noble tasks in service to civilian populations. The laws of armed conflict must be respected at all times and cannot be ignored even in the basest of our human weaknesses. In addressing the challenges faced by civilians in armed conflict, Ghana believes that careful consideration may be given to some of the following priorities.

First, we believe that respect for global conventions and treaties, including international humanitarian law, should be reinforced to provide a solid foundation for protecting civilians in situations of armed

conflict. The commitment of States must be renewed for the preservation and protection of principled humanitarian action, including by encouraging both State and non-State parties to conflicts to comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law. In that regard, we must also be unwavering in ensuring accountability for egregious violations of the laws of armed conflict.

Secondly, in recognition of the primacy of politics, the protection of civilians must be an integral part of any settlement in the resolution of any conflict, not only in terms of peace agreements and ceasefires, but even in moments when humanitarian pauses and truces may offer an opportunity to centre the protection needs of civilian populations.

Thirdly, the protection of civilians should remain a critical and integral component of all the parts of peacekeeping operations and in a manner that not only provides authorization for missions but also the capabilities to use all necessary means, including force, as required to prevent or respond to threats of physical violence against civilians, without prejudice to the responsibility of host Governments. We therefore encourage the further deepening of the policy on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping, and welcome the systematic and meaningful integration of gender and women protection advisers into planning for the protection of civilians at the strategic and operational levels. As we know, while women and youth are unquestionably critical agents of change in conflict situations, it is they who are most often subjected to various forms of abuse, including sexual exploitation.

Fourthly, we believe that the Security Council can help strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict by improving reporting mechanisms for monitoring and tracking civilian harm through the adaptation of tools such as the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for the six grave violations of children's rights in conflict and the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements in response to sexual violence in armed conflict. We believe that expanding such mechanisms to cover reporting on civilian casualties or the use of explosive weapons in populated areas would provide standards and a clear methodology for tracking, mitigating and reducing civilian harm. Attention could also be given to regular reporting on the gaps and challenges in delivering humanitarian assistance in areas of armed conflict. That can be done by ensuring that the reports submitted

to the Council include comprehensive recording and reporting of all types of serious civilian harm, including records of casualties, and could help build momentum in the Council for identifying proactive ways to address the challenges.

Fifthly, the risks to civilians and humanitarian workers posed by misinformation, disinformation and hate speech during armed conflict represent a driver that needs to be managed. Promoting discussions and exchanges within humanitarian organizations, as well as awareness-raising programmes among civilian populations on humanitarian law and human rights law, would be useful in bridging knowledge asymmetry. We further recommend including the issues of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech in training programmes for stakeholders, and note that it would be useful to have capacity built for humanitarian mapping and analysis in a way that extends its reach among the relevant stakeholders. While digital technologies such as mobile-phone applications may create opportunities for effective humanitarian action, they also expose vulnerable populations to malicious activities. We therefore underscore the crucial role of building resilience by investing in understanding current information-security threats and adopting strategies to protect data. The 2021 Inter-Agency Standing Committee Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action is useful in that regard.

Lastly, we encourage the strengthening of support for regional arrangements to help sustain efforts in the protection of civilians. Such bodies are the international actors closest to armed conflicts and usually have a better understanding of how civilian populations can best be assisted before their situations get out of hand. In that regard, we note that enhanced partnerships between the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States, for instance, could lead to the effective implementation of the regional body's humanitarian policy aimed at addressing the barriers to humanitarian assistance in the region of West Africa and the Sahel.

Before I conclude, I want to emphasize that Ghana reaffirms its belief that strong and genuine political will and commitment on the part of Member States, with support from civil-society organizations and other partners, is indispensable to the urgent enhancement of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As a major troop-contributing country to United Nations peace operations, Ghana considers the protection of

civilians a high priority and will continue to ensure that its troops are given the training and support they need to carry out their mandate with regard to the protection of civilians.

Mr. Roscoe (United Kingdom): I thank you again, Madam President, for convening us on this critical issue today.

We are grateful to our briefers. It was very good to hear their views on the practical and impactful steps that the Council and other United Nations Member States should take if we want to protect civilians and humanitarians. As Mr. Miliband said, it is not about us taking new initiatives, but about being determined to ensure the application and delivery of existing commitments. That is because wherever there is war or armed conflict, civilians are always caught in the middle. Indeed, 2022 has been another devastating year for civilians in conflict, including in Myanmar, Syria and Ukraine. As we heard again today, the number of displaced has surpassed 100 million, a desperate threshold.

In Ukraine, Russia is targeting civilian infrastructure and attacking civilians indiscriminately. No one can evade that fact. In Myanmar, humanitarian workers are murdered, along with the women and children they are aiding. And just today, we heard about the International Rescue Committee humanitarians attacked in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our thoughts are with the victims, but they need more than just our thoughts. In many conflicts, access to aid is being weaponized as a military strategy, which increases the human cost of war. We have also seen parties to conflict treat with increasing contempt the international rules and humanitarian law designed to protect civilians in conflict. Only last month, the Council debated ways to help reduce the scale of conflict-related sexual violence around the world (see S/PV.9016). I would like to say that I was really struck by the very practical approach that Ms. Boketa's organization is taking and by the incredible stories of Solange and Cinama. We owe them our side of the bargain as they strive to improve their own situation. Action can also be supported in other ways by us, as States. I would like to talk about three ways in which we can do that today.

The first is that States can do more in the area of prevention by embedding civilian protections into their own domestic law and operations. That includes putting in place appropriate legislation and institutional

arrangements to comprehensively address violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and human rights, and, critically, holding those who commit such violations and abuses accountable. That is the really important point. We cannot overstate the power of deterrence or the cost of impunity.

The United Kingdom continues to produce voluntary reporting on its own domestic implementation of international humanitarian law. And we encourage others to do the same to establish that pattern of behaviour. With the assistance of the British Red Cross, we are offering support to other States to produce their own reports to help identify best practice, to identify gaps in domestic law and ultimately to improve compliance.

The second area in which we can take action is that we, as members of the Security Council, as many of our briefers said this morning, can make better use of the tools we already have at our disposal for identifying and addressing threats to civilians. That includes the tools established in resolutions 2286 (2016), 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021). They are designed to give us timely, evidence-based warnings when parties to conflict are blocking access, destroying indispensable civilian objects or using starvation as a method of warfare. As Mr. Miliband said, they should not be allowed to gather dust, and we should all reflect on that. And once the threats are identified, we have to be ready to take action. The Security Council must take decisions that advance humanitarian access. And once again, we call on the whole Council to renew and expand resolution 2585 (2021), granting the United Nations cross-border access to millions of Syrians.

And the third and final point is that we need to do more to protect those working to aid civilians in some of the highest-risk environments in the world, including, as we heard again today, through tackling the dangerous spread of misinformation and disinformation on the work of humanitarian organizations, which puts the lives of both humanitarian actors and vulnerable civilians at risk.

Indeed, when it comes to disinformation, I am afraid that we have experts on that dangerous technique on this very Council. The Russians today have followed their discounted and patent nonsense about biolabs in Ukraine with more attempts to obfuscate and distract us with further revisionist accounts of what happened in Bucha. When it comes to the Russian delegation,

fiction is stranger than the truth. But such distraction attempts cannot obscure the blood of civilians on their hands day after day during its illegal invasion in Ukraine. Frankly, it is remarkable that they have the chutzpah to speak on this agenda item, and it is no surprise that they did not address the real issues.

The Security Council has adopted many resolutions calling for accountability for attacks on humanitarian workers and civilians. We need to turn those words into action and ensure those responsible for such attacks are held accountable.

But the reality is that time and time again, members, especially some permanent members of the Security Council block our attempts to protect civilians. They often use spurious arguments designed to obscure their real self-interested reasons, and when they do that, they negate the true purpose of the Security Council — to save civilians from the horrors of war. And at times the track record of some States in our work does not align with the rhetoric that they themselves make in this Chamber, and we should reflect on that too.

For our part, the United Kingdom will continue to use its seat on the Security Council to do the opposite — to support those providing relief and use the tools we have to take steps to prevent conflicts before they begin and assist civilians and humanitarians caught up in them.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): I would like to thank the United States for organizing this year's debate on the protection of civilians. I would also like to thank the briefers for their informative presentations.

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

The evolution of the Council's treatment of the protection of civilians is remarkable. That is attested by two important resolutions approved by this body last year alone: resolution 2573 (2021), on objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in armed conflict, and resolution 2601 (2021), on the protection of schools and education.

Yet strengthening the protection of civilians architecture has not been enough to reduce the heavy civilian toll of armed conflicts. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/381) indicates, in 2021, the United Nations recorded over 11,000 civilian casualties

across 12 armed conflicts. The current challenges are well known: the use of explosive weapons in urban and other densely populated areas; attacks against civilian infrastructure, schools and medical facilities; hostilities against medical and humanitarian personnel; conflict-related sexual violence; and increased vulnerabilities faced by women, children, refugees, internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities. Moreover, the vicious cycle of armed conflict and hunger continues to pose challenges to the most vulnerable.

Conflicts not only disrupt food production, but also cut off trade and distribution. It is no coincidence that the majority of chronically undernourished people live in countries affected by conflict. The imposition of unilateral economic measures in conflict situations further distorts supply chains and food markets. According to the Secretary-General's report, in 2021, around 140 million people faced acute food insecurity where conflict and insecurity played a major role in driving hunger, up from 99 million in 2020. Such a situation should serve as a reminder of the human devastation that any armed conflict can cause, and a call to strengthen efforts to prevent and cease them.

I would like to highlight three points while addressing the guiding questions outlined in the concept note of this open debate.

First, peacekeeping operations continue to play a role in promoting strategies for the protection of civilians, as more than 95 per cent of United Nations peacekeepers are mandated to protect civilians. It is therefore important to explore how best United Nations peacekeepers can contribute to strategies for the protection of civilians. In that context, United Nations peacekeepers should scale up the use of strategic communications, which can foster local dialogue and engagement, as well as create a protective environment. Strategic communications can contribute to the protection of civilians objectives in several ways, such as dissuading retaliatory attacks; informing local communities on the measures that missions are taking; discouraging local populations from joining armed groups; clarifying misinformation, as well as missions' objectives; promoting social cohesion; and countering narratives that exacerbate violence.

Secondly, all parties to armed conflicts should facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for relief actions that are humanitarian and impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, in line with

international humanitarian law. It is worrisome that some parties to conflicts have been imposing bureaucratic measures to hinder humanitarian operations, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report. Another challenge relates to the reports of unintended consequences of United Nations sanctions on humanitarian assistance. Brazil encourages the Council to continue its work to adjust the sanctions framework so that they effectively minimize the suffering of the civilian population. The humanitarian carveouts in Somalia's and Afghanistan's sanctions regimes are good examples, which could be replicated to other situations. Humanitarian actors should not be impeded from performing humanitarian and impartial relief actions due to overcompliance or the possibility of the criminalization of their activities.

Thirdly, international humanitarian law already provides a solid framework to protect civilians, as provided for by the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. It is therefore clear that the problem is not the absence of norms, but the lack of implementation and respect for them. The Security Council should call for respect and adherence to international humanitarian law in a consistent manner. Any violation must be subjected to impartial and non-selective mechanisms of accountability, including through the relevant international criminal law instruments.

In conclusion, let me once again reiterate Brazil's commitment to the protection of civilians' agenda, in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the Organization.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I would like to thank the United States presidency for having convened this important meeting. I also want to thank our briefers this morning: Mr. Rajasingham, Director-General Mardini, Mr. Miliband and Ms. Boketa. Their messages — and, importantly, I must say, their recommendations — are just what we need to hear here, but, more important, what we need to heed.

Let us be clear: ensuring humanitarian access is a matter of life and death for civilians trapped in conflict. Reaching civilians in their moment of need could not be more central to their protection. It could not be more central to what we believe should be the work of the Security Council. I will focus on three points relating to the access challenges facing humanitarians globally.

First, in conflict-afflicted countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Syria, South Sudan, Mali and

Myanmar, hostilities and attacks on humanitarian staff have greatly hindered the civilian population's access to life-saving assistance. That insecurity is delaying, reducing and, in some cases, preventing aid flows. Put simply, it costs lives. How many times must we repeat in this Chamber the phrase "humanitarian workers must never be targets"? How many more times must we insist that those responsible for attacks against them be held to account?

Such attacks also force humanitarian organizations to adjust their practices. They disproportionately transfer risk to local humanitarians. In some cases, humanitarian organizations are forced to withdraw entirely. Mr. Rajasingham elaborated on those challenges earlier.

In 2021, 98 per cent of humanitarians killed, injured or kidnapped in conflict contexts such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo were national staff. As Ms. Boketa clearly and powerfully pointed out earlier, women in conflict situations, civilians and humanitarians face additional challenges and are met with violence on a daily basis. That is starkly evidenced in Haiti, where violence and insecurity, particularly systematic sexual violence, require urgent, survivor-centred responses.

In Tigray, as millions face starvation, humanitarians have faced major impediments in transporting relief items, fuel and medicine into the region. We think that it is shameful that only 11 per cent of what was needed from July to December last year reached the civilian population. Visa denials, the expulsion of United Nations and non-governmental-organization staff and the targeting of humanitarian personnel have been a defining feature of that conflict. All the while, the spectre of insecurity looms large. Our calls have been clear. The recent improved flow of aid must be expanded and accompanied by the restarting of essential services in the region.

Bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian access can amount to de-facto denials of humanitarian access. Let us be clear: the arbitrary denial of humanitarian access is also in contravention of international law. In countries such as Myanmar, humanitarians are required to overcome visa blocks, onerous registration requirements and significant restrictions on their operations. The veil of bureaucracy cannot be used to conceal humanitarian suffering from the international community. In some areas, the denial of access has

evolved from a consequence of conflict to a weapon of war. David Miliband made that point eloquently this morning.

Secondly, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas continues to have a devastating short-, medium- and long-term impact. Civilians represent almost 90 per cent of casualties when explosive weapons are used in populated areas. That is compounded by the destruction of critical infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals and sanitation facilities.

Where we cannot prevent or resolve conflict, we must work to minimize harm. That is why it is a priority for Ireland to continue to lead consultations to strengthen the protection of civilians from the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We are determined to deliver a political declaration that leads to operational changes in practice and in policy — one that enhances the protection of civilians during armed conflict. The high level of engagement from States, including many present here today, international organizations and civil society is encouraging. We hope to conclude negotiations in the coming months.

Thirdly, to protect civilians, the Security Council needs to meet our promises and implement what we have agreed. We heard that message loud and clear yesterday at the Arria Formula meeting that we hosted on the protection of journalists. The Council needs to implement resolution 2222 (2015).

Resolution 2417 (2018), on conflict and hunger, provides the tools to alleviate current, and prevent future, access issues, which block food-insecure populations from life-saving assistance. What is needed now, as ever, is implementation.

The renewal of the United Nations cross-border operation into north-west Syria is critical to ensuring that humanitarian assistance continues to reach millions of people in grave need. As co-penholder, alongside Norway, Ireland will continue to work constructively with all Member States to ensure that the Council upholds its duty to the people of Syria.

Sanctions and counter-terrorism legislation are not intended to have adverse humanitarian consequences. That is a shared responsibility of all members of the Council and one that Ireland takes seriously. Resolution 2615 (2021), required in response to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, serves as a demonstration of

what can be done when the Council comes together and acts together.

In conclusion, it is clear that in conflicts such as in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Syria, Yemen and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Security Council has failed to deliver the political protection that we can collectively offer. Some of our briefers said that bluntly to us today. At this table, we have a responsibility to protect civilians. Seventeen years ago, the United Nations adopted a global commitment on the responsibility to protect. But vulnerable civilians continue to suffer the consequences of wars not of their making. That is a damning indictment.

Let us therefore be frank: if we do not use all the tools available to us now, next year's debate will hear of an even graver situation on the protection of civilians. It will hear of an even higher toll of death and destruction.

I now want to address those who are parties to ongoing conflicts and those who support them. They have a responsibility to protect civilians. International humanitarian law must be respected. Allow humanitarians to do their work without hindrance or interference. Put an end to the suffering of war. It is never too late to do the right thing.

Mrs. Dime Labille (France) (*spoke in French*): Let me first thank the United States for having organized this open debate on the protection of civilians. I also thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Mr. Robert Mardini, Mr. David Miliband and Ms. Rachel Boketa for their briefings and testimony. Their findings are clear — civilians continue to pay the highest price for conflict. I would like to highlight three points.

First, the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers is an obligation under international humanitarian law that is binding on parties to conflicts. That obligation to protect extends to civilian infrastructure essential to the survival of populations, in particular hospitals and medical facilities, facilities providing access to water and electricity, as well as agricultural crops and infrastructure. Regrettably, we see parties knowingly incorporating violations of international humanitarian law into their military strategy. Those violations increase the suffering of the population and multiply the humanitarian needs.

In Ukraine, Russian forces are using the same methods as those used in Syria alongside the Al-Assad regime: first, encircling cities, massively bombing

them and then besieging them, trapping civilians, targeting essential civilian infrastructure and using foreign mercenaries. In Mali and the Central African Republic, local armed forces and mercenaries from the Russian Wagner Group are committing numerous abuses against the civilian population.

Secondly, we must also step up our efforts to address the shrinking humanitarian space, which prevents populations in need of humanitarian aid from receiving it. Because of its special commitment to that issue, France organized a Security Council meeting in July 2021 (see S/PV.8822) on safeguarding humanitarian space. As it is a prerequisite for the survival of populations, safe and unhindered humanitarian access must be guaranteed, without conditions. Moreover, we cannot and must not tolerate or accept the harassment, arrest or killing of humanitarian personnel. We must strengthen civil-military coordination and the use of humanitarian deconfliction mechanisms wherever necessary. The protection of civilians must remain at the heart of peacekeeping operations.

We must also create, in the texts we adopt in the Council and in our national legislation, an environment conducive to the operations of neutral and impartial humanitarian actors, in accordance with international law — for example, by combating over-compliance with bank practices and by ensuring that humanitarian actors cannot be sanctioned or prosecuted for the sole reason of having carried out humanitarian activities in accordance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. We must sanction violations of international humanitarian law with regard to the protection of civilians by making better use of the tool of sanctions against those responsible for those violations.

Finally, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected by all. Respect for international humanitarian law was one of the priority themes of the first European Humanitarian Forum, which France and the European Commission organized in March 2022 in Brussels. It is also at the heart of the Call for Humanitarian Action, launched by France and Germany, which now has 53 signatories.

The Council's contribution to the fight against impunity must also be strengthened, as must cooperation with fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry and the instruments of international criminal justice, first and foremost the International Criminal Court, for the most serious crimes. We must also continue to use these

important tools to combat violence against children and sexual violence, among other things. France is doing just that, particularly with regard to sanctions regimes, in which it is a leader.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): We offer our deepest condolences to the United States and the families of the victims of the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

I thank the briefers for their contribution to this debate.

The principal reason war offends us sufficiently to form the United Nations is its destruction of human life, safety and well-being. We established the Security Council to lead humankind's united response to threats to international peace and security. On paper, we have all the required tools to resolve conflict and ensure that, where it breaks out, the conduct of the war accords to international humanitarian law. Unfortunately, our multilateral tools are collapsing under the weight of weak political will, the untrammelled pursuit of self-interest by the powerful and the continuing inequality among and within nations. The citizens of the world are losing hope in the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. We need to show them that we are fit for purpose.

For this debate, Kenya would like to focus on terrorism, especially the kind practiced by jihadists affiliated or inspired by Al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). Their armed assaults are a form of warfare that is directly aimed at civilians. Groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia and its fellow travelers do not cause civilian harm as a collateral result. No, murdering civilians is their primary method of seeking their political aims. Unless Al-Qaida and ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups in Africa, such as Al-Shabaab, are targeted with all the means the Security Council has at its disposal, the resulting harm to civilians will be catastrophic.

If multilateralism is to deliver sustained peace and protection of civilians from terrorism, the Council must get more serious about facing that challenge in Africa. Tens of thousands have already been brutally murdered in the past decade. Livelihoods have collapsed in multiple areas. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been produced throughout the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa. The harm to civilians is not an abstract number on a page. Many have perished from suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices, vehicle-borne

explosives, torture, mutilation, sexual violence, hunger and pure misery.

The status quo will not hold. The piecemeal approaches by the Council will only yield failure and the mass murder of many thousands more. We all know the solution but keep resisting its implementation. Are African lives not precious enough to move the Council to bold action against terrorist groups who announce daily their aim to dismember States and collapse governance?

There are many actions that the concerned Governments should take — from the inclusive management of diversity, the delivery of local development, adherence to human rights protection and increasing competence. But none of those efforts will come close to succeeding if there is no robust, sustained military and police pressure on those groups.

We all know this, and the Council is in a position to act on that knowledge. We know that we need to deploy capable regional forces with access to predictable and adequate funding and with access to appropriate intelligence and force multipliers. If we do not, we will only be passive observers of a spreading catastrophe. If we do nothing, then history will judge us harshly and the whole world will reap the harvest of multiple collapsing or collapsed States.

Connected to that is the need for humanitarian actors to understand the need for robust action against these groups. Terrorists are exploiting the humanitarian space and its associated civilian objects. These groups, understanding the humanitarian concerns over civilians who are victims of conflict, utilize the population to generate finances, disguise their operations and recruit from traumatized, uprooted refugees and IDPs. The terrorists must be militarily suppressed. Civilians must be protected from them. And we must work on development. We simply lack the ability to maintain multigenerational humanitarian action as a primary mode of engagement for the international community.

There are a few actions that we can take immediately if we have the will and want to show that African lives do matter. One is to apply the full suite of sanctions to these groups, their funders, recruiters and facilitators. We must also take seriously humanitarian carve-outs. We must stop the self-defeating tension between countering terrorism that causes humanitarian emergencies and humanitarian work. Secondly, we must apply sanctions against individuals and groups

that exploit the humanitarian space as a key part of their strategy and operations, to further their terrorist agenda. Thirdly, we must ensure that peacekeeping mandates are fit for purpose to challenge these groups, protect civilians and strengthen national military and police competencies. We must make sure that peacekeeping missions have robust public messaging and counter-narrative capabilities against terrorist groups operating in the same territory.

Military action against these groups is not the sole solution; it should be accompanied by other supporting initiatives. But I want to focus on what the Security Council can do and should do. What is untenable is dragging our feet, reluctantly using the tools at our disposal and sending the signal that African lives and emergencies are of secondary importance when attacked by Al-Qaida and ISIS groups. We urge all participants to take action now before further lives are lost, with the Security Council not taking action.

Ms. Juul (Norway): We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2022/381), and I thank today's briefers for highlighting the continuing challenges to humanitarian action, clearly demonstrating that we must make better use of all tools available to us.

Let me start by focusing on five of these tools. First, the conclusions adopted by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must be implemented. They are important practical measures both for parties to conflict and for the United Nations to enhance the protection of children. The children-in-armed-conflict mandate is crucial, and the Council should look at enhancing the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in prevention.

Secondly, we urge all States to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration, which would strengthen the implementation of resolution 2601 (2021) on the protection of education in conflict.

Thirdly, the Security Council should adopt strong protection mandates for peacekeeping operations and political missions, including during transition phases. And adequate resourcing must be ensured, including for child protection. The *Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence* must be part of training and used in all missions.

Fourthly, resolution 2286 (2016) on protection of health care must be implemented. The Health Care in Danger initiative led by the International Committee of the Red Cross has identified very useful recommendations and best practices.

Finally, civilian suffering caused by urban warfare, such as in Russia's aggression against Ukraine, is unacceptable. We welcome the political declaration proposed by Ireland on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Armed forces must adopt and implement specific policies and practices to avoid civilian harm.

Persistent challenges to humanitarian action in conflict must also be addressed. We call for stronger support for the life-saving response mounted by local and international humanitarian organizations and for female responders to take the leading role. Local women must participate in the design and implementation of humanitarian responses. Also, neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organizations must be allowed to carry out their mandates safely and without interference or politicization.

Dialogue with all parties on the protection of civilians, conduct of hostilities and urgent humanitarian access and safe passage is at the core of the humanitarian mission. Moreover, there must be no impunity for attacks against humanitarian workers. Ensuring freedom of expression and access to information and documentation are essential to this end.

Furthermore, parties to conflict must fulfil their obligation under international humanitarian law to allow and facilitate safe, rapid, and unhindered humanitarian access. In this regard, the Security Council has determined that denial of humanitarian access is one of the six grave violations committed against children in armed conflict.

We also want to recognize that humanitarian actors must be able to, on a daily basis, negotiate and maintain access locally. The Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation is an initiative on front-line negotiations, which can improve both access and safety for humanitarian workers.

Finally, counter-terrorism measures and sanctions are vital tools for protecting civilians and addressing threats to international peace and security. At the same time, we must take all necessary measures to avoid unintended negative impacts on humanitarian action,

including through broad humanitarian exemptions when appropriate.

The Security Council has advanced the protection of civilians and preserved humanitarian space through resolutions, mandates and conclusions in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Let this inspire us to hold ourselves accountable and take further practical steps to fulfil our commitments. This demands leadership and political will.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for bringing the issue of protection of civilians to the Security Council for today's discussion. There is hardly any other question more important and more central to the work of the Council. I thank the briefers for their updates and detailed information and for their valuable recommendations.

We recognize the significant progress made in building an international normative civilian-protection framework. However, and regrettably, compliance with the laws and norms that safeguard civilians has deteriorated along with the safety and security of civilians caught in armed conflict. Mr. Miliband reminded us of the shocking number of conflicts ongoing in the world today. Every conflict brings a devastating impact on civilians, critical civilian infrastructure, livelihoods, education, health systems, and food and water security, particularly when explosive weapons are used in populated areas. In places with poor or destroyed health infrastructure, civilians continue to be at a high risk, not only during but also after conflict. Conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence are occurring at shocking levels.

In Syria, millions of people continue to be deprived of their homes and livelihoods as a result of a conflict that has entered its twelfth year. Schools, hospitals and other protected objects have been indiscriminately and deliberately attacked. The huge humanitarian needs underscore the importance of a sustainable long-term cross-border humanitarian response to ensure that all Syrian people in need receive assistance.

In Ukraine, civilians continue to suffer the consequences of the Russian aggression, which today has entered its fourth month. More than 14 million people have been uprooted from their homes and forced to leave everything behind. More than 200 health-care facilities, more than 1,600 schools, numerous shelters and thousands of residential and apartment buildings have come under continued, deliberate and devastating

attacks with thousands — and mounting — civilian casualties. These crimes are documented, including in United Nations reports.

We know that conflict is the main driver of hunger worldwide. The war in Ukraine is no exception, but with tremendous magnifying effects. It has seriously disrupted food systems and markets worldwide, with sharp price rises everywhere, and exacerbated food-insecurity challenges for several developing countries.

All parties to armed conflict are responsible for ensuring that the civilian population is protected. They must guarantee compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law; provide safe passage and ensure humanitarian access; and ensure protection to civilians without discrimination.

In the face of mounting civilian casualties, war crimes and crimes against humanity, we must do everything to ensure accountability by ending impunity. Perpetrators everywhere must be held to account. Accountability for violations must be concrete, systematic and universal. Crimes not punished breed yet more crimes.

The Council has adopted resolutions calling for accountability for those who target health-care and humanitarian workers and critical infrastructure. It should uphold its decisions. That is its responsibility.

We must support international independent investigative and prosecution mechanisms, and, when the Council is blocked or taken hostage, we must seek other ways. We cannot and must not become familiar with impunity.

In every conflict, women, children, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups suffer disproportionately. The situation becomes even more desperate when those working to help civilians in need are themselves the targets of attacks. We have witnessed the deliberate denial of humanitarian access, including through the blocking of the passage and delivery of humanitarian assistance. Hampering humanitarian aid workers in their efforts to reach those most vulnerable and in dire need is tantamount to a death sentence for those who need it immediately. We should neither accept nor allow the weaponization of humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian workers save lives; they should be welcomed, not confronted or threatened; their work should be facilitated, not complicated or denied; and

they should be free to operate safely, everywhere, and for all those in need.

The best way to protect civilians is, of course, to prevent and resolve armed conflicts before they escalate. In the absence of dialogue and political solutions, weapons take central stage, with the catastrophic consequences we have seen so many times.

We have the laws and the tools to protect civilians. We must use them. It requires political will and resolve. That is what is expected from every one of us, from the Council and every State Member of the United Nations.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): As today is Africa Day, I should like to extend warm, festive greetings to the representatives of the African Member States present here, to all African countries and to all of our African brothers and sisters. The independence and self-reliance of Africa embodied in Africa Day has become our shared spiritual treasure.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Rajasingham; Director-General Mardini; Mr. Miliband; and the civil-society briefers for their statements. What they described is both disconcerting and sobering.

Parties to conflict are obligated to protect civilians under international law. The Council has adopted a number of resolutions and presidential statements on this very subject. Many peacekeeping operations have prioritized the protection of civilians in their mandates. However, to this day, countless civilians have fallen victim to the disasters brought about by armed conflict. That harsh reality serves as a reminder that the international community must continue to make unremitting efforts to protect civilians.

First, it is vital to strictly abide by international law and international rules. It is important to implement international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, resolution 1265 (1999), and other resolutions on the protection of women, children and medical workers. All parties to conflict must refrain from harming innocent civilians or civilian facilities, prioritize protecting vulnerable groups such as women and children, and provide safe, unimpeded humanitarian access. International humanitarian actors should comply with General Assembly resolution 46/182; adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence; work together to maintain the humanitarian nature of aid and avoid politicizing humanitarian assistance. They

must ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers and prevent all acts of violence against them.

It must be pointed out that double standards severely undermine efforts to protect civilians. The protection of civilians applies to all parties and all armed conflicts, without any distinction, and all forms of exceptionalism must be abandoned. Those countries that have engaged in the largest number of foreign wars and for the longest period of time should the specially reflect on themselves.

Secondly, following a membership-owned and membership-led approach, Member States bear primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. The international community should focus on both the current reality and the long-term future and provide targeted assistance to the countries concerned so as to strengthen their capacity in the protection of civilians. The Council should respond to the appeals made by the Governments of the countries concerned and regional organizations, especially the African Union, and adjust arms embargoes in the light of developments, so as to create favourable conditions for the countries concerned to assume their primary responsibility for the protection of civilians.

The arbitrary freezing and diversion of foreign exchange reserves and the organized theft of energy and agricultural resources by some countries have not only deprived the countries concerned of life-saving monies for relaunching development but have indirectly taken away valuable resources for humanitarian aid. The international community should jointly urge those countries to immediately stop such actions.

The civilian protection mandate of United Nations peacekeeping operations should be realistic and feasible. It is important to closely cooperate with the countries concerned in the implementation process, fully guarantee their resources and capacity, make full use of good offices and mediation as a means of implementation, and only use force as a last resort.

The efforts made to protect civilians should not be denied just because there have been tragic cases of massive civilian deaths owing to ineffective international intervention. Denying the ownership and leadership of Member States would open up a Pandora's box and make it convenient for a few countries to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, or even bring about regime change under the pretext of

protecting civilians, which could lead to greater civilian suffering due to turmoil and war.

Thirdly, committing to the peaceful settlement of disputes is key. All parties to conflict must actively resolve their differences through dialogue, negotiation and other peaceful means and support all efforts conducive to the peaceful resolution of crises. Following the concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and upholding the principle of the indivisibility of security, all countries need to work together to build a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture and strive to create a peaceful and stable international environment. The Council should earnestly assume its primary duty for the maintenance of international peace and security, facilitate the political settlement of hotspot issues and bring peace and hope to people in conflict-affected areas.

It must be pointed out that the current international security landscape has become more volatile, with hegemony and power politics prevailing and cold war thinking and confrontational ideology rising. That will bring more challenges to efforts to protect civilians. We urge the countries concerned to stop creating divisions and geopolitical confrontation around the world, including in the Asia-Pacific, stop drawing demarcation lines based on ideology, and stop coercing other countries to take sides.

Fourthly, pursuing development is a top priority. Poverty and underdevelopment are major root causes of conflict. Owing to the impact of the coronavirus disease and geopolitical factors, a global food and energy crisis and a global financial crisis are looming. Global poverty-reduction efforts have encountered new challenges, and developing countries are facing greater needs. Developed countries must abide by their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their national income to official development assistance and provide tangible assistance for developing countries to achieve sustainable development.

This is a time when the development and humanitarian needs of a large number of developing countries are rising sharply, while certain developed countries are experiencing a steady decline in funding for official development assistance and have even taken decisions to drastically cut such assistance. We call on the countries concerned to heed the call of Secretary-General Guterres and reconsider their decisions.

Mrs. Alhfeiti (United Arab Emirates): I thank you and your team, Madam President, for having organized this important open debate, and we thank the briefers for their informative presentations.

As we have just heard, despite significant progress over the years in the applicable legal framework, the global state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict remains bleak. Civilians continue to pay the price of armed conflict, with high levels of death and injury and disproportionate impacts on women and children. Sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war, along with torture and terror. Indeed, 97 per cent of the recorded victims in 2021 were women and girls.

For the first time in history, the number of forcibly displaced persons has now passed 100 million. Terrorist groups have continued to deliberately target civilians, including homes, schools, hospitals and even our natural environment. That is unacceptable.

The scale of the challenges facing humanitarian efforts is also alarming. That includes severe limitations on humanitarian activities, access constraints and a disturbing number of humanitarian actors killed, injured or kidnapped. The Council cannot fail those serving our most vulnerable. We therefore welcome the special focus of this debate on humanitarian access.

In the light of the human suffering across armed conflicts, the United Arab Emirates would like to reiterate its commitment to protecting civilians and calls on all parties to conflict to comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law. That includes their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access as well as to protect humanitarian workers.

We would like to make the following recommendations.

First, we must consider how we can adjust the mandates of peace operations to enhance the vital role that they play in protecting civilians. Properly addressing threats to civilians requires a comprehensive approach. In designing the mandates of peace operations, we should consider whether and how they can foster a secure environment to enable humanitarian assistance. We should also give appropriate consideration to unarmed approaches to complement the fundamental physical protection provided by peacekeepers. For example, in order to tackle the root causes of conflict, including misinformation and hateful narratives, peace

operations could be mandated to promote local dialogue, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence among community members. Additionally, we should seek to strengthen outreach activities within each country context as well as to ensure effective coordination with the rest of the United Nations presence in the country.

Secondly, States and the private sector must redouble their efforts to detect, assess and respond to online misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, so as to effectively protect civilians and humanitarian workers. That can be done through fact-checking, content-moderation tools, regulations and further research on how misinformation and disinformation proliferate online.

The scale of online misinformation, disinformation and hate speech and the speed at which they proliferate has deadly consequences. It exacerbates conflict, put civilians at risk and complicates protection. We are deeply concerned at the fact that the distortion of information related to humanitarian needs has weakened the ability of humanitarian workers to conduct their operations. We are also alarmed at the distorted information on social media that questions the neutrality of impartial humanitarian workers, thus endangering their safety and threatening their access to those in need. Today we reaffirm the importance of protecting both online and offline humanitarian workers, upholding humanitarian principles.

Thirdly, we must continue our efforts to ensure that the sanctions measures that the Council imposes do not impede humanitarian actors in the undertaking of their essential work or prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching those in need. That is important in both the design and implementation of sanctions. In practical terms, that means considering humanitarian carve-outs that exclude the application of sanctions to humanitarian activities. We should also consider requesting independent evaluations on a case-by-case basis, for example, by the groups of experts assigned to sanctions committees to report on the impact of sanctions measures on humanitarian operations. That could help the Council to appropriately adjust its sanctions to prevent adverse humanitarian effects. Moreover, while listing those responsible for obstructing humanitarian assistance, the Council could use sanctions as leverage and send a clear message to support humanitarian efforts and ensure accountability.

Finally, it may be stating the obvious, but it bears repeating that the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent and resolve conflict, as was stated by many Council members. The United Arab Emirates, from its side, is committed to redoubling all efforts that support political processes and dialogue to that end.

Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to express Mexico's condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of the United States in connection with the shooting that took place yesterday in Uvalde, Texas, a community with a large population of Mexican origin.

I thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Mr. Robert Mardini, Mr. David Miliband and Ms. Rachel Boketa for their outstanding briefings.

Once again, the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2022/381) reflects very worrying trends. The continuing attacks on humanitarian personnel and civilian infrastructure, including critical facilities, as well as the use of explosives in urban areas, the widespread availability of weapons and the effects of unilateral sanctions are extremely alarming challenges. They are compounded by the additional challenges that the coronavirus disease pandemic has posed in terms of the protection of the civilian population in recent years.

The war in Ukraine represents a new challenge in terms of protecting civilians. That is why, together with France, we promoted initiatives to address the humanitarian challenges arising from the conflict, resulting in the adoption of resolution A/ES-11/2. We take the opportunity of this debate to once again stress the need for an immediate ceasefire.

We heard the delegation of the Russian Federation say that their country has contributed to the development of international humanitarian law. Indeed, that is true. The first treaty in that area, known as the Saint Petersburg Declaration of 1868, prohibited the inflicting of unnecessary suffering on parties to armed conflict and constitutes the antecedent for the principle according to which death is not inevitable and that the legitimate use of force must be aimed at weakening the enemy, never at its annihilation.

And how could we forget the legacy of the famous Russian jurist Fyodor Fyodorovich Martens, author of a central tenet of contemporary international humanitarian law. Let us hope that those antecedents

will inspire all of those who are involved in the 56 ongoing conflicts.

This new conflict in Ukraine comes in addition to the long list of situations outlined in the Secretary-General's report, which include the cases of Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Horn of Africa, where prolonged cycles of violence continue and whose main victims are always civilians, disproportionately affecting women, girls and boys, as well as people with disabilities.

The number of people affected by those conflicts has been multiplied even further owing to the food crisis, which has increased the number of people in situations of food insecurity, including famine. I should like to highlight some of the issues of greatest concern to my delegation.

First, it is paradoxical, if not absurd, that in a world where the pandemic is still ongoing, attacks on medical and humanitarian personnel persist, whether through kidnapping or other forms of targeted attacks, which in 2021 alone claimed the lives of 219 medical workers. In 14 countries, more than 143 incidents against humanitarian workers were recorded in the same year. Meanwhile, more than 3 billion people still had not received a first dose of vaccine by the end of last year. How can we achieve universal vaccination when those in charge of administering it are attacked?

It is undeniable that there is a crisis in the implementation of the obligations derived from the norms of international humanitarian law and the resolutions of the Council. The Council plays a central role as the custodian of respect for international humanitarian law, together with the commendable work carried out day after day by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

It is not enough to make calls for compliance. It is necessary to reinforce measures at the internal level to ensure their implementation, such as the adoption of national legislation, military manuals and ongoing training. That requires working hand in hand with civil-society organizations.

It is also key to combat the politicization of humanitarian activities and disinformation, as has been mentioned here. Similarly, it must be ensured that unilateral sanctions, as well as measures to combat terrorism, do not impact humanitarian activities or violate international humanitarian law.

On the other hand, the wide availability of weapons, including small arms and light weapons, as a result of negligent practices in the arms and ammunition trade as well as of their illegal trade, fuels conflicts and the spiral of violence. For that reason, last year Mexico promoted the adoption of resolution 2616 (2021), which seeks to strengthen the control of that type of weapon in a cross-cutting manner. The implementation of the resolution will strengthen control and help reduce the possibility of weapons falling into the wrong hands.

Likewise, the use of explosive weapons in urban or densely populated areas remains a worrying trend given its major impact on the civilian population. Such weapons have excessive and indiscriminate effects, causing serious injury, long-term mental-health effects and damage to civilian infrastructure such as medical facilities, water installations or schools. Mexico therefore is actively participating in the consultations under way to achieve a political declaration on that issue.

Finally, it is not enough to point out the serious violations committed against the civilian population in armed conflict. As these constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, it is imperative that such acts not go unpunished. For accountability to become a reality, there must be consequences for those responsible. In line with the principle of complementarity, the Council has the power to refer situations to the International Criminal Court.

In that respect, the Franco-Mexican initiative on the restriction of the veto in cases of mass atrocities could represent a first step to avert such atrocities. We invite those that have not yet done so to join the 105 States that have already signed up to that initiative.

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

I now give the floor to the State Secretary at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany.

Ms. Baumann (Germany): I thank you, Madam President, for having convened this important meeting. I also thank the briefers for their enriching contributions.

Russia's unprovoked and illegal aggression against Ukraine, the horrible crimes committed in Bucha and in many other places and the siege of Mariupol all are

grim reminders of the fact that it is first and foremost civilians who suffer when international law and international humanitarian law are blatantly violated.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has recorded more than 8,000 civilian casualties so far, but the real number is much higher. Many of them are the victims of Russia's indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas, such as shelling from heavy artillery as well as indiscriminate missile and air strikes. Summary executions, sexual violence and enforced disappearances, including of public officials, journalists and civil-society activists, violate the basic rules of international humanitarian law.

We all have the haunting pictures of Russia's victims in Mariupol, Kharkiv and Bucha in mind — women, children and elderly persons. Equally haunting is the fate of civilians in Syria, in Yemen, in South Sudan, in the Congo, in Afghanistan, in Myanmar, in Ethiopia and, unfortunately, in so many other places.

More than 70 years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, it is high time to act. I will make three points.

First, we need full accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law. We must use all instruments at hand to establish accountability for Russian perpetrators in Ukraine at the International Criminal Court and in the Human Rights Council and its Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. National investigations will support those efforts, and Germany is proud to contribute to all of them. All perpetrators must be held accountable, wherever their crimes were committed.

Secondly, we need to strengthen the humanitarian space. We need safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access and safety for humanitarian workers. The steep rise in the number of health workers killed in armed conflict is alarming. Along with France, we have launched the call for action for the protection of humanitarian space and invite others to join that call.

Thirdly, we need to put survivors' rights and needs first. That is true for children pressed into armed forces and for victims of sexual and gender-based violence, in line with the women and peace and security agenda and resolution 2467 (2019), introducing a survivor-centred approach.

Last but not least, United Nations peacekeeping remains crucial for protecting civilians in many conflicts. That is why Germany has just decided to continue its significant contribution to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Germany is also supporting the Action for Peacekeeping initiative. We attach particular importance to two instruments: first, digital transformation to achieve real protection-of-civilians gains on the ground, and, secondly, supporting MINUSMA's work on conflict-related sexual violence.

Effectively implementing protection mandates remains a major challenge, but civilians count on the Blue Helmets, in Mali and in so many other conflicts.

I would like to close by thanking the courageous men and women in the field who do everything to help civilians in need and too often risk their lives by doing so.

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

Mr. Keçeli (Turkey): At the outset, we wish to express our condolences to the families of the victims of the shooting that took place yesterday in Texas.

We thank you, Madam President, for convening this annual open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is indeed a sorry reflection of the global protection crisis that we must continue to speak on this most basic tenet of international law.

Today 100 million people are on the move, forcibly displaced from their homes. They are innocent civilians fleeing persecution and conflict. We have seen mass graves in Tarhuna, Libya; starvation used as a weapon of war in Yemen; and violence perpetrated by security forces since the coup in Myanmar.

The war in Ukraine has resulted in one of the starkest humanitarian crises of our time. Attacks on Ukrainian civilians have resulted in the disruption of agricultural and food supply chains, showing the world that an attack against one civilian is indeed an attack against all of humankind.

And of course, the war in Syria rages on. Just last month, footage from 2013 provided detailed evidence of horrific crimes committed against civilians in the Tadamon neighbourhood of Damascus. In Idlib, civilians and civilian infrastructure are routinely

targeted by the regime and its backers. In Al-Atarib, a hospital was attacked, killing civilians and cutting off vital health-care services for the community. The attack on the Arshani pumping station interrupted access to water for a quarter of a million civilians. The regime deliberately deprives people in the Al-Bab region of drinking water and water for agriculture.

We also wish to remind the Security Council once again of the atrocities committed by the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units and its offshoot, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, for it bears repeating. They attacked Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin. They continue to abduct and forcibly recruit children in Syria. They release Da'esh detainees for their own financial gain. They indiscriminately attack civilian areas, using mortar shelling, rocket launchers and car bombs. They prevent civilians, including Kurds and Yazidis, from returning home. They have even cut off electrical power in Al-Dirbasiyah, disrupting the Allouk water station. Those who support terrorist organizations, including in Syria, must cease their association with immediate effect.

It is clear that the status quo will not suffice. We need a renewed and principled approach to protecting civilians in conflict. The international community and the Security Council must step up. Unhindered humanitarian access is a core element of protecting civilians in conflict and an essential element of the maintenance of international peace stability. In that context, we renew our call for the extension of the mandate of United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations to Syria.

We hope that, by the time of next year's open debate on the protection of civilians, some of the 100 million people who have been forcibly displaced will have returned home and restarted their lives in safety. We also hope that the perpetrators of all attacks against civilians will have been brought to justice and held accountable for their actions.

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

Mr. Larbaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for its sound conduct of the work of the Security Council during the month of May.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/381), in which he clarifies that civilians are still suffering from the scourge of armed conflict and stresses the need for greater efforts to provide them with the necessary protection. We look forward to more comprehensive reports covering all conflict situations.

In that context, we welcome the focus on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need, given that malnutrition is one of the side effects of conflict and that preventing access to humanitarian assistance and using hunger as a war tactic constitute gross violations of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions.

We also believe that the current humanitarian access crisis is a reflection of the already dire situation based on the increased humanitarian needs resulting from our collective failures. Regrettably, the international community has failed to find political solutions to put an end to armed conflicts. We have witnessed the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in recent times due to the international circumstances surrounding the coronavirus disease pandemic, which disrupted production, supply and distribution chains, thereby exacerbating the suffering of those trapped in armed conflict situations. Civilians are also suffering due to further political instability and turmoil, all of which have direct and destructive impacts on the protection of civilians.

My country appreciates the leading role of the Security Council in the protection of civilians, especially following the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which gave top priority to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. That resolution is one of the pillars of United Nations peacekeeping operations, as civilians in conflict situations are usually subjected to violations of their dignity and safety, as well as threats to their life.

My country also stresses the need to provide humanitarian assistance to all those in need, while ensuring full respect for international humanitarian law and relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 46/182, which provides for the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality and the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States in line with the Charter of the United Nations. That would ensure the best protection for civilians in situations of armed conflict.

In that regard, I would like to highlight the following essential elements, as set out in the report of the Secretary-General.

First, we must ensure full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, which are cornerstones for guaranteeing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need. In that vein, we stress the importance of adopting a working mechanism that automatically informs the Security Council of any gross and documented violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Secondly, all those who obstruct the delivery of support to people in need must be held accountable, as delays in, or reductions of, food supplies and other basic needs would exacerbate the situation.

Thirdly, we must adopt a comprehensive approach whereby all efforts at all levels aim to facilitate coordination and communication in order to ensure the delivery of the necessary humanitarian assistance. In that regard, we call for the participation of all actors in considering how best to respond to those in need and taking decisions related to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Fourthly, mobilizing the necessary capabilities and assistance is crucial in order to meet the growing needs of civilians in conflict areas. In that connection, we stress the need for all donors to meet their pledges so that the necessary assistance can be provided and the priorities of international relief work can be met.

Fifthly, economic development is the most important requirement for meeting the basic needs of civilians. We call for the adoption of an approach to development that reduces the reliance of individuals on assistance and instead enhances their livelihoods.

In conclusion, all proposals on the protection of civilians in conflict situations and the facilitation of the delivery of humanitarian assistance will remain only partial solutions if we do not also address the root causes of conflicts and find sustainable solutions for them. We must ensure the stability and safety of States and promote sustainable development in all its environmental, economic and social aspects.

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

Mr. Eldandarawy (Egypt): I would like to express our appreciation to the United States for its presidency of the Security Council this month and its convening of this timely annual open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also thank the briefers for the informative analyses they provided to the Council.

We are holding this open debate at a time when we continue to witness a concerning global increase in armed conflicts, which has vast implications for the protection of civilians and adds further challenges to the application of international humanitarian law. As a result, long-term challenges continue, including displacement, food insecurity and obstacles to accessing water, health care, education and other essential services, which further burden the plight of civilians. Unfortunately, women and children continue to be especially severely impacted by the negative effects of such instability.

The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381) further illustrates the challenges associated with armed conflict, including the continued loss of civilian lives, increasing food and energy prices and further pressures on supply chains, which were already impacted as a result of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

The report also highlights that medical workers and facilities continue to come under attack, which has led to the deaths of health-care workers and the destruction and damage of health-care facilities. That is unfortunately taking place at a time when the pandemic continues to have grave effects on conflict-stricken countries and efforts aimed at ending armed conflicts.

It is therefore essential that we continue to advocate for the importance of ensuring safe access to, and the delivery of, health care in situations of armed conflict and to protect humanitarian and medical personnel and peacekeepers during such conflicts so as to ensure that they continue to operate towards the fulfilment of their mandates and contribute to the protection of civilians.

As such, Egypt worked with other Security Council members in 2016 to introduce resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflicts, which was adopted unanimously. That important resolution draws on existing legal frameworks that bind parties to armed conflicts and condemns violations of international humanitarian law. It also urges Members States to adopt practical measures

to prevent the occurrence of such violations and calls for ensuring unimpeded access to medical care.

The continuation of armed conflicts highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the immense challenges involved, taking into account the root causes of such conflicts and considering methods to enhance the protection of civilians on a longer-term basis, including by promoting sustainable development, job creation, economic growth, poverty eradication and the provision of sustainable and effective political solutions to conflicts, as well as ensuring that they do not reoccur. That can materialize only by recognizing the need for enhancing regional and international stability and taking collective action to counter the threats posed by international terrorism to already volatile regions.

The role of non-State actors in armed conflicts and targeting civilians adds further challenges to the prolongation of conflicts, threatening regional and international stability and increasing the risks of the smuggling of weapons and other illicit materials. That reflects the continued importance of enhancing the role of relevant State institutions and the national mechanisms responsible for addressing conflict in order to promote stability and adherence to international law.

Moreover, peacekeeping operations continue to play an instrumental role in the protection of civilians by providing assistance, capacity-building and strengthening State institutions, while focusing on promoting national ownership.

Egypt continues to be a major contributor to peacekeeping operations, in recognition of their valuable role in protecting civilians, advancing stability and assisting countries in transitioning from conflict to peace. It is therefore important to provide peacekeeping operations with adequate human and material resources and to meet all commitments to ensure they are provided with sufficient resources.

In conclusion, it is imperative that the international community continue its efforts towards promoting the protection of civilians in armed conflict. As the Secretary-General's report mentions, the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts and settle them peacefully. The growing global challenges further complicate the plight of civilians, which necessitates a joint effort to alleviate their suffering and bring about development, stability and economic growth. For its part, Egypt will

continue to call for the promotion of peace and stability and advocate for advancing the protection of civilians within the United Nations multilateral system.

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

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

We thank the United States for organizing this important debate, and the briefers for their contributions.

As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/381) highlights, the global state of the protection of civilians is grim. In Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen and too many other places, civilians suffer most from the consequences of armed conflict. That must change — and it can change only as a result of strict respect for international humanitarian law on the part of all parties to armed conflict in all circumstances.

We would like to particularly highlight the importance of incorporating and implementing international humanitarian law at the national level. Fundamental services such as medical care for the wounded and sick are hampered or willingly attacked in many contexts. The Group of Friends recalls the provisions of international humanitarian law and resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of the medical mission, both of which must be rigorously implemented by all parties to armed conflict.

Furthermore, with the trend that saw more conflict-driven hunger last year, more efforts are urgently needed to prevent and alleviate hunger in situations of armed conflict, in line with international humanitarian law, resolution 2417 (2018), on conflict and hunger, and resolution 2573 (2021), on critical civilian infrastructure.

In addition, the number of forcibly displaced persons is at a record high, and almost two thirds of them are internally displaced persons. We therefore welcome the development of the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and encourage all relevant actors to implement its recommendations in close consultations with the Member States concerned.

In some contexts, entire generations of children are growing up without ever having lived in peace. The

Group of Friends calls on all actors to prevent grave violations against children's rights and ensure their specific protection needs. In that regard, we welcome last year's adoption of resolution 2601 (2021), which places particular focus on safeguarding the right to education.

Conflict-related sexual violence affects children, women and men, with 97 per cent of recorded victims being women and girls. The stigmatization of survivors must end, so that survivors feel able to come forward, access services and seek accountability. In that regard, strengthening judicial systems is also essential. Preventive measures to ensure that such horrible acts do not recur are paramount.

The Group of Friends stresses the importance of respecting international humanitarian law and the need to enhance the protection of civilians, including from the humanitarian impacts that could arise when explosive weapons are used in populated areas. The Group of Friends takes note of the ongoing consultations led by Ireland.

Turning to peace operations, we acknowledge the important efforts made to improve the protection of civilians by peacekeeping operations through the Action for Peacekeeping and Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiatives. Furthermore, we emphasize that transitions to other forms of United Nations presence require a particular focus on the protection of civilians. We call on the Council, the United Nations and Member States to ensure that protection is anchored as a priority in the early planning and implementation of transitions in order to avoid gaps in the security of civilians.

This year's report describes the overlapping challenges for humanitarian operations. I would like to stress two points in that regard.

First, the security of humanitarian actors and their assets must be improved. That is one of the most important prerequisites for ensuring rapid, safe and unimpeded access for all those in need.

Secondly, the non-criminalization of contact with all parties to armed conflicts, including all armed groups, with the aim of negotiating access and respect for international humanitarian law, is paramount.

Finally, we echo the Secretary-General's recommendations contained in the report and strongly encourage the Council, Member States and the United Nations to implement them.

(spoke in French)

Let me add two points in my national capacity and endorse the following words of the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross,

“The very essence of humanitarian work and the Geneva Conventions is that neutral and impartial organizations can act in times of war”.

In upholding that affirmation, Switzerland would first like to emphasize that there is ample evidence that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures can have unintended negative consequences for humanitarian efforts. As the adoption of resolution 2615 (2021), on Afghanistan, confirms, where there is political will, there are solutions to mitigate that challenge, such as full humanitarian exemptions. We call on the Council to include such exemptions in all sanctions regimes and counter-terrorism measures, and on Member States to implement them accordingly.

Secondly, climate change, environmental degradation and armed conflict are mutually reinforcing and cause a negative spiral that threatens the safety and security of the affected population. The adverse impact of climate change can also prolong ongoing conflicts. It not only increases the number of civilian victims but also poses a threat to long-term peace and development efforts. Those issues must be addressed comprehensively and without delay.

As a candidate to the Security Council, Switzerland is committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the full implementation of international humanitarian law. We work to be a plus for peace and a plus for human dignity in times of war.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on the list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, with the concurrence of the members of the Security Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 2.15 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.