



Arria-Formula Meeting of the Security Council on Upholding International Law in Situations of Armed Conflict

**Organized by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations
Wednesday, 16 September, 15:00-1800 hours, Conference Room 6**

Concept Note

Armed conflict tests not only the resilience of societies, but the strength of the international legal order itself. Across contemporary conflicts, civilians continue to bear devastating and often enduring consequences: loss of life and injury, denial of fundamental rights, forced displacement, demographic changes, destruction of homes and essential civilian infrastructure, deprivation of basic services, restrictions on humanitarian access, and damage to cultural and religious heritage. Upholding international law in such situations is therefore both a legal imperative and an essential condition for the maintenance of international peace and security.

2. The international legal framework applicable to armed conflict rests on several mutually reinforcing bodies of law. The Charter of the United Nations prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State under Article 2 (4) and requires disputes to be settled by peaceful means under Articles 2 (3) and 33. Where armed conflict nevertheless occurs, international humanitarian law regulates the conduct of hostilities and protects persons, who are not, or are no longer, taking direct part in hostilities. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols, the Hague Regulations, and customary international humanitarian law constitute the core of this framework, complemented by applicable international human rights law.

3. The protection of civilians lies at the heart of international humanitarian law, yet civilians continue to bear the gravest consequences of armed conflict. The Secretary-General's 2026 report on the protection of civilians recorded more than 37,000 civilian deaths across 20-armed conflicts in 2025 — equivalent to one civilian killed every 14 minutes. The Fourth Geneva Convention establishes fundamental protections for civilians in the hands of a party to the conflict or occupying Power, while customary international humanitarian law and Additional Protocol I require respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, and protect civilians and civilian objects against attack.

4. International law also provides specific protection in situations of occupation. The Hague Regulations of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 establish the legal framework governing occupation and the protection of civilian populations in occupied territory. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits individual or mass forcible transfers and deportations

of protected persons from occupied territory and prohibits an occupying Power from transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. These rules assume particular importance in protracted situations where displacement, settlement activity or other measures may alter the demographic composition of occupied territory and create long-term consequences.

5. The effects of armed conflict can extend beyond physical destruction to the history, identity and collective memory of communities. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocols establish specific protection for cultural property, while international humanitarian law protects civilian objects, including cultural and religious property, in accordance with applicable rules. Damage, destruction or unlawful appropriation of cultural and religious heritage can deepen divisions, erode the identity of affected communities and create lasting impediments to reconciliation and sustainable peace.

6. International human rights law continues to apply during armed conflict, subject to the applicable legal framework, including rules governing permissible derogation. Together with international humanitarian law, it provides important protection for individuals affected by conflict and occupation. Protracted conflicts can have particularly far-reaching consequences for the enjoyment of human rights. Over time, displacement, weakened institutions and prolonged insecurity can transform exceptional conditions of conflict into enduring patterns of deprivation.

7. The Security Council has developed an extensive framework for addressing these challenges. Beginning with resolution 1265 (1999) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Council has adopted decisions addressing the protection of medical personnel and facilities (resolution 2286 (2016)); conflict-induced food insecurity and starvation (resolution 2417 (2018)); missing persons (resolution 2474 (2019)); persons with disabilities in armed conflict (resolution 2475 (2019)); civilian infrastructure and objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population (resolution 2573 (2021)); and the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel (resolution 2730 (2024)), among others. These resolutions reinforce the principle that respect for international law and the protection of civilians are integral to the maintenance of international peace and security. Yet the persistence of serious violations across armed conflicts demonstrates a continuing gap between legal obligation and compliance.

8. Upholding international law requires consistent and non-selective application. When comparable violations receive markedly different responses, perceptions of politicization, lack of impartiality and objectivity and double standards can weaken respect for international law and confidence in multilateral institutions. Effective prevention, compliance, and accountability are therefore mutually reinforcing: accountability can deter recurrence, while consistent adherence to legal obligations can prevent grievances from hardening into new cycles of violence.

9. The Security Council, entrusted with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, has a key role in promoting respect for international law. Its tools — including preventive diplomacy, conflict-specific and thematic decisions, monitoring and fact-finding mechanisms, peace operations, sanctions and engagement with regional organizations — can contribute to prevention, compliance and accountability. Equally important is the consistent implementation of the Council's own decisions and sustained attention to the underlying causes of protracted conflicts.

10. Against this backdrop, the Arria-formula meeting will provide an informal platform for Security Council members, the wider United Nations membership, international humanitarian actors, civil society and legal experts to examine challenges to upholding international law in armed conflict, including situations of foreign occupation.

Objectives

11. The Arria-Formula meeting aims to:

- i. Reaffirm the centrality of the United Nations Charter, international humanitarian law, and applicable international human rights law to the maintenance of international peace and security and the protection of civilians;
- ii. Assess the consequences of violations of international law in armed conflict, including protracted conflicts and situations of foreign occupation, for civilians, humanitarian access, displacement, demographic composition, civilian infrastructure and cultural and religious heritage;
- iii. Identify practical measures to strengthen compliance with international law by States and parties to armed conflict, including through prevention, monitoring and accountability;
- iv. Examine how consistent application of international law can contribute to preventing recurrence, addressing the consequences of protracted conflicts and creating conditions conducive to sustainable peace; and
- v. Explore how the Security Council can more effectively promote respect for international law through the tools available to it under the Charter and the implementation of its relevant resolutions.

Guiding Questions

12. The discussion will be guided by the following questions:

- (a) What are the principal challenges to compliance with international humanitarian law and applicable international human rights law in contemporary armed conflicts, and how can they be addressed?
- (b) What practical measures can strengthen the protection of civilians, humanitarian and medical personnel, civilian infrastructure and cultural and religious heritage during armed conflict?

- (c) How can international law be more effectively upheld in protracted conflicts and situations of foreign occupation, including in addressing forced displacement and demographic changes?
- (d) How can monitoring, fact-finding and accountability mechanisms more effectively prevent serious violations of international law and deter their recurrence?
- (e) How can the Security Council promote more consistent and non-selective compliance with international law and strengthen implementation of its relevant resolutions?
- (f) How can respect for international law be better integrated into conflict prevention, mediation and the peaceful settlement of disputes to address the underlying causes of conflict and contribute to sustainable peace?

Briefers

TBC

Format

13. The Arria-formula meeting will be chaired by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations. All United Nations Member States, Permanent Observers and relevant United Nations entities are invited to participate.

14. To facilitate broad participation, statements should not exceed three minutes. Time management will be strictly observed. The meeting will last approximately three hours.

15. Speaking slots will be prioritized for members of the Security Council, followed by other interested delegations and organizations, time permitting. Interpretation in the six official languages of the United Nations will be provided, subject to availability. Delegations wishing to take the floor are requested to inscribe on the list of speakers by close of business on Tuesday, 15 September 2026.
