



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9327th meeting

Tuesday, 23 May 2023, 9.30 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Berset/Mrs. Baeriswyl/Mr. Hauri (Switzerland)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. Vieira
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Dery
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mr. Vella
Mozambique	Mr. Nyusi
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
United Arab Emirates	Ms. Almheiri
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Lord Ahmad
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in conflict: addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services

Letter dated 1 May 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/307)

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2023/345)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in conflict: addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services

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Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2023/345)

The President (*spoke in French*): I would like to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, the Presidents, Ministers and other high-level representatives to the Security Council and thank them for their presence today, which underscores the importance of the subject under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Türkiye, 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: Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Aïchatou Mounkaïla, President of the Network of Women-led Organizations of the Lake Chad Basin.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite I also invite His Excellency Mr. Maciej Popowski, Director-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission, to participate in this meeting.

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/2023/307, which contains the text of a letter dated 1 May 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration, and to document S/2023/345, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

It is my pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in French*): I thank the Government of Switzerland for convening this important debate and President Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Mounkaïla for joining us.

Less than six weeks have passed since war erupted in the Sudan. In that time, hundreds of civilians have been killed, including United Nations personnel. Some 250,000 people have fled the country. Hospitals have been occupied and attacked. The price of goods is reported to have quadrupled in parts of the country, and aid warehouses have been looted on a massive scale.

As terrible as the current reality is, it is far from exceptional. My report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in 2022 (S/2023/345) shows that war is devastating lives throughout the world. Explosive weapons continue to wreak havoc, especially in urban areas. Last year, 94 per cent of those in populated areas who fell victim to such weapons were civilians. The women and men who were able to flee the fighting did so in record numbers. The total number of refugees forced from their homes, owing to conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution reached 100 million. Health-care facilities and schools were devastated, and their workers were injured, kidnapped or killed. At least 2,000 schools were destroyed in three regions of Ethiopia alone. Humanitarian workers also faced regular threats. Their work was hampered by violence, bureaucracy, political considerations and overly broad sanctions and counter-terrorism measures.

In Afghanistan, the ban by the de facto authorities on women working in the humanitarian aid sector is having life-threatening consequences for women and girls.

(spoke in English)

War means hunger. Armed conflict is a key factor driving food insecurity around the world. Last year, more than 117 million people faced acute hunger primarily because of war and insecurity, and this is an outrage. Damage to critical infrastructure hampers food production, blocks distribution and deprives people of safe water. Syria now has 40 per cent less drinking water than it did at the start of the conflict. Fighters destroy crops and steal livestock. Explosives contaminate fertile land. Markets cannot function, and prices skyrocket. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has contributed to the rise in the price of food, energy and fertilizer globally, with terrible effects for the world's poorest. And when conflict combines with the climate crisis, harvests shrink and people go hungry. I saw that for myself during my recent visit to Somalia. After years of war, Somalis have been experiencing their worst drought in decades. An estimated 43,000 people died as a result in 2022 alone, half of them children, and millions were forced from their homes.

There has been action over the past year to alleviate the impact of conflict on civilians. Some parties to conflicts have taken steps to protect children, allow humanitarians to gain access to those in need and more. My newly appointed United Nations Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator is leading a system-wide response to rising food insecurity, and our Action Agenda on Internal Displacement outlines a plan to respond to the record number of displaced persons and prevent further crises.

The Black Sea Initiative and the memorandum of understanding to promote Russian food and fertilizer to global markets has helped to stabilize markets, bring down prices and ease the food crisis. Ukraine has been able to export more than 30 million metric tons of food. That includes life-saving grain transported by the World Food Programme to support humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Yemen. I welcome the Russian Federation's confirmation that it will continue to participate in the Black Sea Initiative for another 60 days. But outstanding issues remain, and the representatives of Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye and the United Nations will continue to discuss them. Looking ahead, we hope that exports of food and fertilizers,

including ammonia from the Russian Federation and Ukraine, will be able to reach global supply chains safely and predictably. That is foreseen in both the Black Sea Initiative and the memorandum of understanding, the implementation of which the United Nations is fully committed to support.

In November 2022, States adopted the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. I urge all States to join this initiative and turn the Declaration into meaningful action.

In December 2022, the Security Council adopted resolution 2664 (2022), aimed at preventing United Nations sanctions from harming civilians and obstructing humanitarian action. I urge all States to implement it and to exclude humanitarian and medical activities from their own counter-terrorism and sanctions measures.

Those modest steps are welcome, but the terrible truth is that the world is failing to live up to its commitments to protect civilians — commitments enshrined in international humanitarian law. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional are the cornerstone of that legal framework. I pay tribute to the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the guardian of those treaties. Its personnel meet danger and brutality with bravery, compassion and humanity, and they will always have my full support. The ICRC's role is unique, it has the mandate to respond, and that mandate must be respected by every Government, every armed group and every fighter.

We must never lose sight of the meaning and purpose of international humanitarian law. It is the difference between life and death, between restraint and anarchy, and between losing ourselves in horror and retaining our humanity. But law overlooked is law undermined. We need action and accountability to ensure that it is respected, and that depends on political will. Peace is the best form of protection. We must intensify our efforts to prevent conflict, protect civilians, preserve peace and find political solutions to war.

In the coming weeks, I will issue a policy brief on New Agenda for Peace in preparation for next year's Summit of the Future, which will offer a holistic approach for Member States to consider, tuned to the times, in order to address peace and security in a

changing world. Where war continues, all countries must comply with international humanitarian law, and members of the Security Council have a particular responsibility. Governments should incorporate international humanitarian law into national laws and military rules and training. Humanitarians must be ensured safe access. Attacks against them must cease, and their work must be facilitated, including by the removal of deadly bureaucratic barriers. It is unconscionable that vital aid languishes in ports and warehouses as people die. The Security Council has a special role to play in urging States to respect the rules of war. Governments with influence over warring parties should engage in political dialogue and train forces on protecting civilians. Countries that export weapons should refuse to do business with any party that fails to comply with international humanitarian law.

Those who commit war crimes must be held to account. States must investigate alleged war crimes, prosecute perpetrators and enhance other States' capacity to do so. We must also do everything in our power to break the deadly cycle of armed conflict and hunger, addressing the underlying causes of hunger by strengthening vulnerable countries' economies, honouring commitments to support countries on the front lines of the climate crisis and increasing contributions to humanitarian operations, which are, shamefully, just 15 per cent funded globally.

Civilians have suffered the deadly effects of armed conflict for too long. It is time we live up to our promise to protect them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Spoljaric Egger.

Ms. Spoljaric Egger: For the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the issue of the protection of civilians lies at the core of our mandate. As we meet, countless civilians in conflicts around the world are experiencing a living hell. At any minute, the next missile can obliterate their homes, schools and clinics and everyone in them. On any day, their loved ones might be abused, raped, detained or tortured. On any week, they might run out of food or medicine. Everywhere I look, I see a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation. In my short time as President of the ICRC, I have visited conflict-affected countries in Africa, Europe and the Near East. Entire regions are trapped in cycles of conflict without an end in sight.

The ICRC's figures show that, over the past 20 years, the number of non-international armed conflicts has more than tripled from less than 30 to more than 90. Many of those are protracted conflicts, bringing ceaseless suffering that is compounded by climate shocks, food insecurity and economic hardship. Civilians are gravely unprotected because they suffer a relentless accumulation of attacks, threats and destruction, as well as political stalemates. When conflicts are characterized by widespread destruction and violations of international humanitarian law, development and peace become an unachievable ambition. In other words, the protection of civilians is a precondition for peace, stability and recovery.

My calls to States today are urgent.

First, States must protect civilians and critical infrastructure in urban areas. The widespread and often indiscriminate destruction of homes and critical infrastructure disproportionately raises the cost of war. Across the places I visited in the past months, I saw how the shock of losing one's home is compounded by the interruption or prolonged absence of essential services such as water, electricity, health care and education. As fighting envelops towns and cities, including in the Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, the ICRC is seeing large-scale and compounding patterns of harm. We need to break the pattern of violations, and that can be done through strong political will and sustained action.

State and non-State parties must do more to prevent, reduce and mitigate the damage that armed conflict causes in urban centres. In adopting resolution 2573 (2021), more than two years ago, the Security Council demanded parties to armed conflicts to do more. I echo that call today. The ICRC urges all parties engaged in urban warfare to ensure that the protection of civilians is prioritized in urban settings; comply fully with international humanitarian law, especially the principles on distinction, proportionality and precaution; refrain from the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas and endorse and faithfully implement the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas; and to ensure that the protection of essential services encompasses the infrastructure, people and consumables that keep hospitals and water and power facilities functioning.

Secondly, States must step up to prevent and mitigate food insecurity in conflict-affected areas. During my visit to the Horn of Africa earlier this year, I saw how conflict and climate shocks are having a devastating impact on already vulnerable communities. In Somalia, more than 7 million people are in urgent need of food and water. The combination of drought, the lack of investment in climate adaptation in conflict zones and the knock-on effects of the international armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine is gravely affecting people in conflicts around the world.

The ICRC therefore calls on States and other actors to respect, and ensure respect for, international humanitarian law, including the rules on the conduct of hostilities, in order to reduce the risk of food insecurity and famine, and to invest in practical solutions and adaptation measures to mitigate the effects of climate change in conflict-affected regions.

Thirdly, I call on States to enable neutral and impartial humanitarian access. That means access to civilians in need, especially those in besieged communities; access to overcrowded detention facilities in which we continue to see worrisome trends in relation to ill-treatment and torture; and access to the estimated 175 million people who live in areas fully or partially controlled by armed groups. That requires enabling a humanitarian dialogue with non-State armed groups, no matter where they are — for instance, through the implementation of the humanitarian carveout for sanctions regimes adopted by the Council in resolution 2664 (2022). That is critical for an organization like the ICRC, which maintains a dialogue with more than 300 armed groups worldwide.

In today's operating environment, misinformation and disinformation also present a threat to populations and hinder humanitarian operations. Misinformation can fuel dangerous community divisions and undermine community acceptance of humanitarian organizations. We urge States and other actors to take all necessary measures to prevent and mitigate the impact of harmful information on the safety, dignity and rights of civilians and to preserve the space for neutral, impartial humanitarian action and to protect it from political instrumentalization.

Finally, I must underscore that the protection of civilians means protection for all. There is no chance of enduring stability or security until international humanitarian law is upheld for all genders. The ICRC

urges States to ensure that all persons, regardless of their gender, are protected in conflict and equally benefit from humanitarian assistance; ensure that the clear prohibition of sexual violence under international humanitarian law be integrated into national laws, military doctrine and training; and to commit to applying a gender perspective into the application and interpretation of international humanitarian law.

The ICRC continues to insist on the preventive and protective effects of international humanitarian law. Compliance with the law protects civilians. It prevents violations and abuses. It reduces the cost of war, while maintaining a pathway to ceasefire agreements and eventually to lasting peace, functioning economies and a healthy natural environment. I call on all States to uphold the Geneva Conventions, including through their influence over others. In times of compounding global trends and geopolitical tensions, compliance with international humanitarian law must become a political priority. I want to thank you, Mr. President, as well as the Secretary-General, for your strong and unwavering support to the ICRC.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Spoljaric Egger for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mounkaïla.

Ms. Mounkaïla (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their remarks, and Switzerland for inviting me to brief the Security Council today as it considers the very urgent issue of conflict and hunger in the world. I am speaking as a woman from the Niger, a country located in the Lake Chad basin and the Sahel.

Before 2015, Diffa, one of the eight regions of the Lake Chad basin affected by the Boko Haram conflict, was our leading area for pepper cultivation and marketing, and I was one of the leaders of the organizations that supported women in rural areas in processing agricultural and seasonal products. In addition to its legendary peppers, Diffa is also the Niger's leading oil-producing region. The region was not developed. There were challenges, but we had the most important thing, the foundation of all development — our security.

Since 2015, the entire Lake Chad basin region has been facing a humanitarian crisis as a result of the attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram and other armed groups.

In just two years, from 2020 to 2022, an additional 7 million people have been identified as being in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, bringing the total number in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in the seven countries of the Lake Chad basin and the Group of Five for the Sahel to nearly 34 million. In addition to the armed conflicts that are undermining people's livelihoods, the climate crisis is escalating. In 2022, heavy rains and flooding had an enormous impact on human lives, property, farmland and livestock in the Lake Chad basin, affecting 5.5 million people, killing nearly 1,000 and putting 1 million hectares under water, 70 per cent of which was agricultural land. That lost productivity could have fed 5 million people. In the Lake Chad basin, the humanitarian crisis, whether climate- or security-related, has a female face — more than 80 per cent of the people living in poverty are women and children. Fighting among armed groups and various law-enforcement bodies has left thousands of schools and hundreds of health facilities closed, while opportunities for decent employment and livelihoods are increasingly scarce.

In the light of that bleak picture, women are struggling day and night to give hope to their families. They make sacrifices so that their children do not go to bed hungry and can stay in school, and in order to care for their loved ones and their communities more generally. They demonstrate exceptional courage and resilience every day. Others, like me, have organized and mobilized to try to break these vicious cycles. I am a founding member and the current President of the Network of Women's Organizations of the Lake Chad Basin. But the women's movement, like other areas on the development, peace and humanitarian fronts, remains poorly resourced and is unlikely to be considered when planning solutions. Women are the primary victims and at the same time the first to provide solutions in every crisis situation.

In 2021, women-led organizations from four Lake Chad basin countries that were grappling with the devastation caused by Boko Haram — Chad, Cameroon, the Niger and Nigeria — organized the Network to address the challenges we were all facing. Our belief that the voices of women and girls must be heard and taken into account united us and gave us the courage to chart our own path through prevention, mediation and peacebuilding. That experience could be leveraged to address the current influx of Sudanese refugees and build peace. As an African woman, I would like

to address the Security Council today with a collective message from my sisters across the Lake Chad basin that I hope will define the Security Council's approach to ending conflict and hunger. On their behalf and my own, I offer the following five-point message.

First, the Security Council should encourage the donor community to allocate more funding to rebuilding gender-sensitive livelihoods such as sustainable agriculture, in which women play a central role, reviving economic opportunities and access to financial services so that women survivors of violence, including sexual violence, can have a chance to rebuild their own lives and communities. Local organizations and communities must be more genuinely empowered to respond to multiple crises.

Secondly, our communities are very fragile, with the result that there is very little difference between host communities, internally displaced persons and refugees in terms of fragility. We should promote only inclusive responses and sustainable solutions based on local responses that draw on the know-how of communities, in particular women.

Thirdly, in line with the 10 resolutions on women and peace and security that the Council has adopted and the related joint commitments that many representatives around this table have signed, I urge the Council to emphasize the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in humanitarian responses, as well as community dialogues, peacebuilding and peace negotiation processes at every level. Women have a key role to play in those processes. Sustainable peace is not possible without them. And in doing so, the Council will also help to build future women leaders. Mediation by women and girls in the Lake Chad basin has greatly contributed to the restoration and stabilization of the region.

Fourthly, I would like to revisit the issue of climate change. The Council and countries that are major contributors of greenhouse gases have to take responsibility for the extent of the climate effects that regions such as mine are experiencing. I ask the Council to support our calls for climate-change adaptation programmes in the agricultural sector, in which more than 80 per cent of women in my country are involved, not only to ensure our agricultural security but also to support our transition to a green economy that is sustainable, respectful of the environment and that

recognizes the role of women, so that our young people today and our generations to come can live in dignity.

Lastly, I am asking the Council to ensure that any of its decisions or actions, including any interventions that it requests and any reports it commissions, include a robust and intersectoral gender analysis, with data specifying sex, age, disabilities and other characteristics as necessary in the context, in particular when implementing resolution 2417 (2018). The Council should insist on gender analyses of conflicts so that it can address the rights and needs of women and girls, who are always the worst affected. That will ensure that commitments undertaken based on the women and peace and security agenda are in line with the Council's responsibility to end conflict and hunger.

I should not conclude without asking representatives to spare a thought for the communities, the displaced women and young people and the refugees who are living in conditions that we can hardly comprehend. All the women of my country and my region are standing alongside me before the Council today. I ask the members of the Council to help us to educate our daughters, to be protected, organized, funded and represented, and to participate equitably in all areas of society, including in humanitarian and conflict-related coordination and decision-making structures. By doing that, they will build lasting peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Mounkaïla for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as President of the Swiss Confederation.

First of all, I thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Aïchatou Mounkaïla for their remarks.

As we have just heard, armed conflicts are all different from one another, but they all have one thing in common, one common denominator — the suffering of civilians. That is now the case, for example, in Ukraine. So far this year, as the Secretary-General underscored in his report (S/2023/345), half of the civilians killed in conflict zones throughout the world were in Ukraine. Their deaths are unacceptable.

The lives of civilians are in constant danger. In conflict zones, it is difficult for them to access food, health care, clean water and other essential services. Civilians' lack of access to essential goods and services

during armed conflict costs more lives in the short and medium term than the direct impact of hostilities. And it is the most vulnerable groups, such as children, people with disabilities and the elderly, who bear the brunt of that.

In that context, respect for international humanitarian law is a priority for all of us around this table. As the depositary State of the Geneva Conventions and headquarters of the ICRC, we feel all the more bound by this humanitarian imperative.

The work that the ICRC does to protect civilians is of immeasurable value. We are therefore concerned about the recent accusations concerning the ICRC's impartiality. Ms. Mounkaïla's account is a reminder of the key role played by civil society and of the need to include civil society stakeholders in our deliberations and actions.

Behind the statistics are the lives of families and individual human beings. In preparation for today's debate, I visited several regions directly affected by problems and instability. For example, I visited Mueda and Pemba, in northern Mozambique, with President Nyusi in order to understand the situation and see the population live in a context that poses various risks. I note that Mozambique has just announced the disarmament and demobilization of the last zone and rebel military base, in the centre of the country. I take this opportunity to thank President Nyusi and the head of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, Ossufo Momade, for their peacebuilding efforts in Mozambique. They showed the world that the most powerful weapon for achieving peace is always dialogue.

Like the Special Representative, I also visited eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I went to Goma and Bukavu, where I met with civilians who had witnessed the murder of a member of their family and whose property had been looted. I met with women who, in a situation of great vulnerability, had been raped. Despite their difficult ordeals, all the people I met were defiant and optimistic about the future.

But we cannot solely rely on the resilience of people. International humanitarian law imposes clear and unambiguous obligations on all parties to conflicts and on us all, the States parties to the Geneva Conventions.

Conflicts are the main drivers of hunger. They exacerbate food insecurity, as the Secretary-General aptly detailed in his report. More and more

people — some 260 million — are facing extreme hunger. That is 30 times the population of New York City. Two thirds live in conflict zones, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the Sudan or in areas rife with violence, such as Haiti, with confirmed and direct consequences — crops destroyed, lands made barren, grain stores razed and markets closed down. But there are also indirect consequences. For example, the water supply can be threatened, the lack of electricity or energy jeopardizes food stores, and the displacement of people results in the abandonment of crops.

We are currently witnessing how Russia's military aggression against Ukraine is driving up prices dramatically around the world. In that connection, Switzerland commends all those who enabled the recent extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. We welcome the good offices of the Secretary-General and stand ready to offer our full support, including in our capacity as a host State.

The Security Council has recognized the link between conflict and food insecurity, and it has condemned unlawful attacks that deprive civilians of supplies that are essential to their survival. In that connection, I mention resolutions 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021). To uphold our obligations under international humanitarian law, in addition to those resolutions, we have robust strong legal, political and operational instruments to protect civilians from conflict-related food insecurity. We must now all do a better job of implementing them in the current situations that we all know.

To that end, I would like to propose five lines of action.

First, of course, all parties to conflicts must stop carrying out unlawful attacks and misusing resources that are essential to the survival of civilians. Human rights are enforceable and must be inviolable, even in conflict situations. In that regard, one measure proposed by the Secretary-General is to reduce the humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. Last year, Switzerland signed the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, and I call on other States to do the same.

Secondly, full, prompt, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all persons in need must always

be ensured. In that regard, I thank all humanitarian organizations working to save lives.

Thirdly, all parties to a conflict who use the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare must be held directly responsible. Starving civilians is a war crime — nothing more, nothing less.

Fourthly, under the women and peace and security agenda, women must participate fully, meaningfully and safely at all levels of decision-making and in all processes aimed at protecting civilians.

Fifthly, United Nations peace operations play a key role in protecting civilians, and it is essential that we strive to maintain that level of protection even when those operations are in a transitional phase. I am alluding here to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which I visited in Goma last month and is operating in a very difficult situation.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians is an urgent matter, and it is imperative that we ensure respect for international humanitarian law. We must work together to ensure the protection of civilians — not only on paper, but in practice.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the President of Mozambique.

President Nyusi (*spoke in Portuguese; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): May I begin by congratulating my dear friend, His Excellency Mr. Alain Berset for the Swiss presidency of the Security Council during this month of May.

The suggested theme for today's debate, ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in conflict, with a focus on addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services, is of the utmost importance in promoting international peace and security.

The sensitivity of this matter, brought by the Swiss Confederation for consideration in this organ today, touches the hearts of many people, including the people of Mozambique, who at this very moment are experiencing that reality.

Ensuring security, respect for human rights and human dignity are the foundations of international humanitarian law, deeply rooted in the 1949 Geneva Convention, its Protocols Additional and the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights. We are committed to that premise. Yesterday in Geneva we reaffirmed that commitment at a meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk.

We commend the Swiss Confederation for its historic role in the establishment of a legal and institutional framework of international reference to relieve human suffering in conflict situations and other humanitarian crises, especially through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC is present in Mozambique. It is one of the most important humanitarian assistance organizations in different types of crises and strictly adheres to the principles of humanism and impartiality in its operations.

In the just struggle for Mozambique's national independence; the war of aggression and destabilization waged by the then racist regimes of Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa, which claimed more than 1 million human lives and caused about 5 million refugees and internally displaced persons; the subsequent military and political tensions which alone created defenceless civilians; and the recurring cyclones and droughts, there has always been a need for the protection of civilians with a focus on food security and the protection of goods and essential services. During those difficult moments experienced by Mozambican victims of violence resulting from conflicts, food security for survival was guaranteed by engaging the people themselves in food production under extremely challenging conditions.

In March, during our presidency of the Security Council, we had the opportunity to explain in depth the process of dialogue for peace (see S/PV.9299), the final phase of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, which, as President Alain Berset has rightly pointed out, might be completed in June with the closure of the last camp of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO). We therefore commend RENAMO and the leadership of RENAMO.

In that regard, I would like to thank the Secretary-General, through his Personal Envoy for Mozambique, who has provided a great deal of support, which will be very important, because we are moving to a phase of paying pensions. I had said that, as a way of striking a balance in terms of the sustainability of peace in Mozambique, my Government has decided to pay pensions for former combatants and, since that

is a new process, the team working on that process should be maintained for some time to ensure that it is implemented.

Therefore, our remarks today will be focused on Mozambique's efforts to protect civilians with a view to ensuring food security and providing essential services in the context of combating terrorism.

Since October 2017, terrorist groups have carried out armed attacks in Cabo Delgado province, which have caused the death of more than 2,000 civilians, the injury of many people and much psychological trauma, the separation of families, kidnappings and violence against women and children.

As in other parts of Africa and the world, in Mozambique, terrorists act outside the principles of international humanitarian law, without respect for life or human dignity. In their modus operandi, terrorists seek to inflict the greatest possible suffering on their victims to increase terror and fear within the population. In addition to forcing a massive displacement of people, terrorist groups settle in areas of higher agricultural and fishing production, depriving populations of access to indispensable resources and undermining their food security.

For that reason, the main concern of our Government and our defence and security forces has been the protection of the life and dignity of civilians, including the social reintegration of those terrorists captured or who flee from their ranks. At the moment, it is estimated that, of the total of 800,000, about 300,000 have already returned to their places of origin owing to the improvement of the security situation in recent months.

In February, President Alain Berset visited Mozambique, as was rightly pointed out, and had the opportunity to travel to Mueda district, where the headquarters of the military command for counter-terrorism is deployed. In Cabo Delgado province, President Alain Berset, owing to his interest in defending civilians in conflict, was able to witness first-hand our efforts to protect civilians and provide essential services. He spoke with internally displaced persons undergoing psychosocial rehabilitation and attending empowerment programmes, mostly for women. Mozambicans are grateful for the encouragement and solidarity expressed during his interaction with civilians.

Actions to protect civilians in my country are the subject of open, shared and concerted debate through a multisectoral commission comprising members of the Government and United Nations agencies. Those are the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross and other national and international non-governmental organizations.

The Mozambique Defence Armed Forces and security forces, in their turn, and those supporting us in the fight against terrorism, namely, Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community, have prioritized the protection of and socialization with civilian populations through joint participation in productive and reconstruction activities, donations, cultural and sports activities, among other activities, and through compliance with the rules of international humanitarian law. We therefore see that people are socializing and soldiers are welcomed in the community, and they participate together in social activities.

In that process, in addition to armed combat of terrorist acts, we have concomitantly adopted a multidimensional approach, taking into account several key dimensions in the resilient protection of civilians in conflict situations, namely, socioeconomic development programmes that are focusing more on the youth, as well as international cooperation efforts. The megaprojects that are operating those projects are also contributing by training young people and women for self-employment. There are also humanitarian assistance programmes and capacity-building of the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces and security forces for sustainable protection of the population and defence of national territorial integrity, even at a time when the countries that support us withdrew from our country. Therefore, in Cabo Delgado province, we have established more than 50 resettlement centres to accommodate internally displaced civilians who cannot be accommodated in the households of members of their families. Upon arrival at the resettlement centre, newcomers undergo a screening process to assess their health situation and ensure adequate assistance as needed.

In order to mitigate food insecurity, in addition to reviving agriculture, we have set for ourselves, as a Government and as a country, the challenge of implementing a programme of rebuilding infrastructure destroyed or vandalized by terrorists in Cabo Delgado

and the replacement of essential public services, such as health facilities, schools, water supply systems, communication and energy, among other infrastructure. Indeed, we have been making inputs available for agricultural production and fisheries to ensure food self-sufficiency and the ability to generate one's own income. The language we have used is that we prefer to give a fishing hook to make it possible to fish forever, rather than giving a fish that has already been caught. In so doing, we are ensuring greater sustainability for those families.

We would therefore like to appeal for international support, given the scale of the destruction imposed and the suffering currently experienced by the affected civilian populations in the northern region of Cabo Delgado

As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Mozambique reaffirms its commitment to continue contributing to the strengthening of international peace and security. We call on the Security Council to continue with efforts to achieve a cessation of hostilities in all conflicts throughout the world that continue to claim human lives, placing thousands of innocent civilians in a perpetual situation of extreme vulnerability.

No one would be right if he or she could not prevent the loss of human life. That is extremely important. Therefore, this week, we shall continue our engagements with all stakeholders of the conflict in Maputo and next month as well at the international level because we know that it is so painful when someone dies and later excuses are made for those conflicts.

Mozambique's mandate in this body is also founded on the nexus between peace and the climate. For this reason, we urge all States to channel all scientific, technological, human and financial resources to counter all types of threats that affect populations, such as human-caused wars, pandemics, hunger and the devastating impact of natural disasters arising from climate change.

I conclude by once again commending the Swiss Confederation in particular, President Alain Berset, for this opportunity to share experiences on the far-reaching topic that is the protection of civilians in conflict situations, with a focus on food security and essential services.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the President of Malta.

President Vella (Malta): Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the Swiss presidency of the Security Council for convening today's meeting on the protection of civilians and extend my thanks to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, and all of the other previous speakers for their inspiring briefings this morning.

The lives of millions of civilians worldwide continue to be impaired by a multitude of crises, including conflict-induced hunger, targeted violence, displacement and climate change. From the Central African Republic to Afghanistan, from Myanmar to Ethiopia, the correlation between conflict and hunger is evident. Millions are battling crisis levels of hunger resulting from the scourge of war and armed conflict, which is a grim reality that the Security Council acknowledged when it unanimously adopted resolution 2417 (2018).

Since 15 April, more than 700,000 people have fled the Sudan in fear. The direct cause of fear is the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. People also fear that hospitals are being deliberately targeted in conflict zones, and they also fear being denied access to desperately needed humanitarian assistance.

In Haiti, extreme levels of gang violence have worsened existing underlying crises, with 600 people killed in Port-au-Prince last month alone. Increasing numbers of women and children have become victims of homicide, sexual and gender-based violence and kidnappings.

In Syria today, protracted conflict has reduced the basic and essential infrastructure — which populations rely on to survive — to rubble. The conflict has pushed children out of school and into early forced marriages. Cholera is widespread. Clean water sources have been defiled, agricultural land contaminated, and the electricity supply cut.

The number of civilian deaths, including those of women and children, in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories including Gaza, remains unacceptable. The indiscriminate firing of rockets and the killing of civilians are also unacceptable. Demolitions, evictions and other violent incidents

continue to heighten tensions and exacerbate an already perilous situation.

The war in Ukraine continues to severely affect the civilian population both in Ukraine and beyond and is compounding already-existing global food insecurity. We are now witnessing a renewed period of violence in the country that will yield yet more deaths and destruction on an industrial scale.

In all of those crises and complex humanitarian emergencies, the protection of civilians and sustained humanitarian access and support must be safeguarded by the Security Council. Arbitrary, discriminatory and bureaucratic impediments that hinder the rapid delivery of vital aid are unacceptable, since, without timely humanitarian access, there can be no meaningful humanitarian response. In that regard, given that sanctions, unless targeted, may have adverse and unintended humanitarian consequences, directly or indirectly, on innocent civilian populations, we welcome the recent adoption of resolution 2664 (2022), which provides for a humanitarian exemption for all United Nations sanctions. Monitoring to ensure civilians do not inadvertently pay the price by suffering unintended consequences for the actions of the sanctioned, is our collective responsibility.

The restrictions on Afghan women's mobility and from working and giving their services to the United Nations and non-governmental organizations have severely affected humanitarian operations across the country. Discriminatory requirements placed on female Yemeni aid workers have also delayed and suspended critical missions and programmes. We must ensure that throughout these times of unspeakable, irrational horror, the fundamental respect for human rights and human dignity remains.

Malta reiterates that in all of these crisis settings around the globe, civilians are not and should never be a target. The humanitarian workers, helpers and volunteers who aid them are not a target. Objects and services that are indispensable to the survival of civilian populations are not and should not be a target. These distinctions are clear. Never can it be said that we did not know.

Malta welcomes the news of an agreement reached by the parties to renew the Black Sea Grain Initiative for a period of another two months, and I thank the Secretary-General for his dedicated efforts in this regard. Unfortunately, we have already witnessed the

impact caused by the disruption of agricultural exports from this region on vulnerable markets far away in the Horn of Africa and the Levant. It is crucial that this lifeline is guaranteed and remains in place as long as it is intended and needed. The world should not be blackmailed by hunger. Hunger should never be brandished as a weapon in any conflict.

Looking to the future, I would like to make the three following points. First, the Security Council must take seriously its obligations to ensure accountability for those who have violated international law, and in particular, those who have ordered or participated in the destruction, or prevented the functionality of, civilian infrastructure that is critical for the production and availability of food. White notes, as detailed in resolution 2417 (2018), must be issued in a swift manner for them to be acted upon at the Security Council. We must stop conflict-induced hunger before it becomes too late.

Secondly, the United Nations can work more closely with warring parties, particularly if they are States, to ensure the adequate deconfliction of infrastructure, be it products or services, which is indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Such deconfliction programmes can act as an additional layer of protection. However, they must not be treated as a substitute for the parties' adherence and due diligence to their own obligations under international law.

Thirdly, it is not enough to rely solely on emergency humanitarian food assistance in the crises of our times. We know that early, time-sensitive support and interventions with farmers, fishers, herders and foresters, whose basic means of survival have been affected by conflict or climate, have enormous positive impacts on the availability of nutrition in such emergencies. We must seek to scale up both emergency food assistance and protect agricultural production in emergencies for the maximum benefit of populations.

Finally, we must increase funding for humanitarian responses. The world's military expenditure is at an all-time high of \$2.24 trillion in 2022, while the United Nations humanitarian response plans, which require \$51 billion for 2023, are struggling to be funded. That is a poor reflection of our global multilateral system and of the values we are meant to uphold. Besides, we must avoid seeing arms and ammunition continuously and regularly arriving in conflict zones, while civilians in those zones are threatened by hunger, if not death,

because humanitarian convoys cannot reach them. The pain, cries and laments of so many men, women and children must be heard and heeded. The world relies on the work and leadership of the Council to protect the most vulnerable from harm, suffering, or worse.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil.

Mr. Vieira (Brazil): I would like to thank Switzerland and you, Sir, for organizing this year's debate on the protection of civilians. I am very pleased to take part in this discussion under your presidency. I would like to thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the civil society representative for their insightful remarks.

At the outset, let me express that Brazil associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the State of Kuwait on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

The choice of topic of this year's debate could not be timelier. Unfortunately, after more than 150 years of progress in the development of international humanitarian law, belligerents have not consistently prioritized efforts to reduce harm to civilians and safeguard essential civil infrastructure during conflicts. The Secretary-General's 2022 report on the protection of civilians (S/2022/381) provides harrowing examples of the need for parties to conflicts to step up efforts to protect civilians.

After lessons painfully learned in places such as the Balkans and Rwanda, the Security Council finally included the protection of civilians on its agenda in 1999. Since then, it has adopted a number of documents that join the robust framework provided by international humanitarian law to protect civilians. Despite the existence of that vast body of norms, civilians remain largely vulnerable in contexts of war, and their lives have not been spared in most instances — indeed, the loss of one civilian life is one too many. The contexts may change, but the actions remain largely the same: the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in urban and other densely populated areas; attacks against civilian infrastructure, schools and medical facilities; the disruption of agriculture and trade; 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.

This month marks the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2417 (2018), which acknowledged the vicious cycle of armed conflict and food insecurity. Its adoption was only the starting point — much more needs to be done. The increase in food and nutrition insecurity in the world is a multi-factor issue, with conflict being one of its main causes. Today a vast majority of the world's population experiencing acute hunger is located in conflict areas. Conflicts, especially protracted ones, contribute to long-term food insecurity. They erode social and economic networks, reduce resilience and disrupt markets, supply chains and infrastructure. They also lead to diminished production and yields, often causing barriers to the achievement of three of the main pillars of food security: stability, availability and access. Therefore, we must translate the provisions of the resolution into meaningful action.

Among the many important recommendations listed in the Secretary-General's report, I would like to highlight the need to find political solutions to conflicts, to support the economies of vulnerable countries and to safeguard livelihoods. Political solutions to conflicts are one of the *raison d'être* of this organ and a necessary tool to address the interplay between armed conflict and food insecurity. Even when the prospects of peace are not yet on the horizon, practical measures to ensure access to food supplies and the delivery of humanitarian assistance are essential to save lives.

Many of the conflict-affected countries were previously net food importers. The aggravation of hostilities deepens even further their already vulnerable situations. The truce and subsequent facilitation of exports to Yemen, supported by the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen, or the opening of new humanitarian corridors in Syria, are powerful examples of how political solutions can yield significant benefits for the food security — and even the survival — of affected populations. We hope that those initiatives will also play a part in rebuilding trust among parties and paving the path for peace.

It is also crucial to acknowledge that the delivery of humanitarian aid through in-kind food transfers can potentially harm countries that still have some production capability. We know that in-kind food assistance to countries that still have functioning markets can distort prices and displace local producers. When feasible, providing aid through cash transfers empowers people to address their essential needs and helps local producers to thrive.

We cannot forget that displacement caused by conflicts often forces people to leave behind their land and livelihoods. This puts them in a very vulnerable situation and exposes them to various forms of food insecurity. The implementation of resilience measures is even more crucial in times of conflict. We recognize the various initiatives that the Rome-based agencies, in partnership with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, are putting in place in countries facing armed conflicts.

In 2022, the conflict in Ukraine sent food and energy prices soaring. Although food prices are back in line with levels similar to those before the conflict began, the scourge of inflation, which is especially harmful to the poor and needy, still hovers over the world. Developing countries have dramatically suffered the repercussions of the conflict in Ukraine owing to their structural vulnerabilities to fluctuations in the prices of food and agricultural inputs. The renewal of the Black Sea Grain Initiative is a key step to limit uncertainties surrounding the global supply of grains and fertilizers.

As the Secretary-General acknowledges in his report (S/2023/345), conflict is a primary driver of acute food insecurity, but it is not the only one. Conflicts, coupled with inflation, trade bottlenecks and other macroeconomic challenges affect access to food supplies, particularly in developing countries. Therefore, it is imperative to pursue responses to food insecurity in all relevant forums.

Unilateral coercive measures, as well as market-distorting subsidies and other forms of protectionism, hamper the ability of developing countries to build resilient agrifood systems and to participate fully in international markets. Without addressing such pervasive practices, they will continue to bear the brunt of global inequities. In that regard, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2664 (2022) in December 2022. It will play an important role in ensuring the delivery of impartial humanitarian assistance, including food and medical supplies, to the millions of civilians who have the misfortune of living under sanctions regimes. Domestic implementation of the resolutions will be crucial for its effectiveness.

As one of the largest food suppliers in the world, Brazil has a significant interest in ensuring food security, both domestically and as a foreign policy goal. Brazil will remain a reliable international supplier to

help complement local production efforts and ensure adequate nutrition in an accessible manner. The Brazilian Constitution recognizes the human right to adequate food, reflecting the country's commitment to addressing food insecurity. President Lula da Silva himself is a notable advocate for the eradication of poverty and hunger, both within Brazil and beyond its borders.

We are also giving due attention to the subject in our current tenure as an elected member of the Council. We are proud to be, together with Switzerland, the focal point for food security and conflict in this organ. As we know, eradicating hunger is of paramount importance for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the light of the significant advancements in agricultural production technology, hunger is entirely preventable and, more important, unacceptable. Societies that are able to feed their populations and offer them economic opportunities are more resilient and less vulnerable to conflict. Reaching that goal is feasible. It is also a moral imperative for all of us.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister of Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates.

Ms. Almheiri (United Arab Emirates): I thank our briefers for their insightful remarks today, and I thank the Swiss presidency for convening this important open debate.

The United Arab Emirates welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/345) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is a vital resource for understanding the trends across more than 100 armed conflicts that continue worldwide. In 2022, more than a quarter of a billion people faced acute hunger in 58 countries and territories, many of which were in armed conflict. Meanwhile, the effects of climate change and escalating prices for food and fuel have compounded the urgent needs of civilians. Basic services are essential to the survival, security and dignity of civilians. In resolutions 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021), the Security Council makes clear demands for parties to conflict to implement their obligations under international humanitarian law. Yet the briefers today rightfully highlighted a matter that is regrettably all too familiar. A key reason that civilians continue to suffer from conflict-induced food insecurity is the gap in the implementation of clearly stated rules. That is why it

is so important that we collectively recommit today to upholding international humanitarian law.

The United Arab Emirates would like to emphasize three points today.

First, in order to address food insecurity, we must rise to meeting the existential challenge of our time, which is climate change. As a risk multiplier, the adverse effects of climate change, such as heavy floods and acute droughts, are already exacerbating food insecurity. Science tells us that, with a business-as-usual approach, natural disasters will occur more frequently and with greater intensity. They risk affecting not just crops but also the infrastructure essential to food systems, in addition to their dire impact on human life. In conflict situations, the capacity of fragile States to recover from such shocks is far lower. And the cost of failing to recognize and prepare for the risks associated with climate change is too great to bear. At the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will be hosted in the United Arab Emirates later this year, both food and water systems, as well as how climate change impacts the ability of nations to recover from disasters, will be high on the agenda.

Secondly, whatever their motives, sanctions cannot be allowed to inadvertently exacerbate food insecurity in situations of armed conflict. That includes the flow of food and agricultural inputs and the maintenance of essential services. Resolution 2664 (2022) was a landmark moment in establishing a carveout from United Nations sanctions to preserve the provision of humanitarian assistance and basic human needs. We call on all Member States to fully implement the provisions of the resolution and encourage them to make similar efforts to ensure that national sanctions do not negatively affect the essential needs of vulnerable civilians. They include the operation, maintenance and repair of essential civilian infrastructure, such as water, electricity and food facilities.

Thirdly, national humanitarian organizations and their women staff must be further supported. Humanitarian aid succeeds in its goal when deployed in a timely and targeted manner. By their very nature, conflict zones are volatile environments where humanitarian work is challenging. The safety of aid workers and civilians' access to humanitarian aid must be guaranteed by parties to the conflict. That is particularly true about women, who form a significant

part of humanitarian organizations and also have a vital role to play in engaging with the community meaningfully. The current situation in the Sudan is the most recent example of such challenges. Fighting in urban areas has prevented international aid actors from reaching civilians, and most aid is now provided by national actors. Those organizations provide life-saving medical assistance and emergency shelter and are critical to the provision of essential services and reducing food insecurity. It is critical to support national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, among other agencies, that are embedded in the communities they support. If it is gender-responsive, the delivery of humanitarian aid will reach a wider audience and alleviate suffering. We call on all actors to ensure that women can do their work unhindered. That is why last month we came together (see S/PV.9314) and underlined our demand for full, rapid, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian actors, both men and women, in Afghanistan. The United Arab Emirates remains committed to supporting the vital work done by Afghan women aid workers.

The international community must step up its response. Our actions must include both supporting humanitarian efforts and protecting essential life-sustaining services. Only then will we meet our collective responsibility and see more effective action for the protection of civilians caught in the crossfire of conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister of the Interior of Ghana.

Mr. Dery (Ghana): Let me begin by thanking you personally, Mr. President, for Switzerland's choice of the topic for this open debate and for your able leadership of the Security Council's proceedings today. I convey the warm regards of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, who is unable to be here in person today owing to pressing matters of State. I also thank the Secretary-General for his statement and note with appreciation the additional briefings by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the civil society representative.

The need to maintain food security and preserve access for civilian populations to essential services is fundamental to the stability and well-being of any society. In normal times, that objective is difficult to achieve for many States but, in violent situations, it can become an almost impossible task for any State. In that

regard, we continue to emphasize the need to prioritize the global actions that preserve peace, prevent conflicts and trigger the early deployment of pacific means for the resolution of disputes before they lead to violence between or within States. Indeed, as noted in the concept note, the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reported in 2020 that,

“70 per cent of the world's population experiencing acute hunger is in conflict-affected areas.”
(S/2023/307, p. 2)

That grim reality is affirmed by the *Global Report on Food Crises 2023*, which outlines the scale and dimension of the problem of conflicts causing hunger, particularly in African countries affected by conflicts. For many such persons, the right to food, which is acknowledged under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and expressed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, is an illusion, as their capacity to have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food is severely impaired.

As we reflect on more than five years of the implementation of resolution 2417 (2018) and the important contribution it has made in establishing the interlinkages between conflict and hunger, as well as the need for global respect for norms relating to a population's right to food, Ghana believes that the most important task before us is breaking those destructive links, even in the midst of ongoing conflict, and ensuring that food systems promote peace and its associated positive effects on the supply of safe and nutritious food to civilians. In that regard, we continue to urge the international community to implement a series of emergency measures and simultaneously pursue long-term development investments to break the vicious circle of hunger and conflict. More specifically, we would like to share some priority areas of global action with respect to global emergency measures.

As a first measure, we must act with urgency, and at scale, to respond to the acute food insecurity and nutrition needs of the millions of vulnerable people in conflict situations around the world, especially in Africa, which is the hardest hit. The vulnerable populations in places such as Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, the Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Haiti can no longer wait until there is a perfect

outcome among all the parties to their conflicts. Amid the prevailing challenges, we must press on to remove barriers obstructing food systems, particularly human-made obstacles, and deliver assistance where it is most needed.

Next, we encourage the strong deployment of diplomatic, political, legal and humanitarian tools to reverse the rapid and dramatic deterioration in food security observed in conflict-affected settings and urge the international community to make unified calls demanding that parties to conflict comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Such demands, where necessary, must also specifically request the parties to refrain from targeting food systems and other livelihood support infrastructure.

As a third measure, we urge the strengthening of prepositioned assets, including global humanitarian hubs such as the International Humanitarian City in Dubai and regional humanitarian hubs such as the one in Accra, to be able to interconnect food stocks quickly and effectively with humanitarian needs. The international humanitarian community must also deepen its national and regional coordination mechanisms for programming and responding to humanitarian crises and work to align its interventions with national and regional response plans. In addition, major donors must cooperate to shift funds out of separate silos to enable integrative work, in a manner that does not prioritize food distribution to vulnerable communities over the sustainable approach of helping them to reconstruct their food systems.

As we know, short-term actions to respond to crises are not sufficient. Long-term development investment is key to breaking the vicious circle of hunger and conflict. In that regard, and with a focus on the African continent, which is acutely aligned with food insecurity and conflict concerns, I would like to make three brief points.

First, our actions must focus on building resilience in economies and food systems. That calls for support for initiatives including, first, the African common position on sustainable food systems; secondly, the further implementation of the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme and its results framework; thirdly, regional food security facilities, such as the Economic Community of West

African States' Regional Food Security Reserve; and fourthly, the effective and full implementation of the \$1.5 billion African Emergency Food Production Plan facility of the African Development Bank to boost food security, nutrition and resilience on the continent.

Secondly, support for the accelerated and full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area is critical in averting food supply chain disruptions on the African continent, especially for regions that may be experiencing drought conditions and the impact of climate-change-induced situations that could aggravate conflict triggers.

Thirdly, we advocate the need to integrate peacebuilding objectives into the creation of resilient food systems, with a backward interlock of food security objectives into peacebuilding programmes and activities.

In conclusion, I would like us to recommit to acting with urgency, at scale and in concert, to respond to the urgent food security and nutrition needs of the millions of vulnerable people around the world, whose situation has been exacerbated by conflicts. Let us also recommit to providing immediate humanitarian assistance, building the resilience of the most vulnerable and strengthening sustainable, resilient and inclusive food systems, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Lord Ahmad (United Kingdom): It is a pleasure to join today's open debate under your stewardship, Mr. President, and I thank you and Switzerland, for convening this important debate at this important time and acknowledge your contribution and those of His Excellency the President of Malta and His Excellency the President of Mozambique. Seeing stewardship at the Head-of-State level also indicates the importance of this particular subject. I was also particularly moved by the quite specific contributions of Minister Dery of Ghana, who outlined quite specifically the requirements of Member States regarding how we can do more in resolving conflict. Of course, I acknowledge the valuable insights of our expert briefers. The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, highlighted some of the practical steps and challenges she faces and the responsibilities of coordinated responses with member States. Ms. Mounkaïla provided unique insights from Africa, which are extremely valuable, as we see drivers

of climate change as a key consequence, which then drives conflict itself.

The Secretary-General himself paints a bleak picture, and rightly so, of the conflicts that rage around the world. More than 20 major live conflicts are currently gripping the globe, from across all continents — in Myanmar, Mali, Ukraine, the Sudan, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Somalia, to name but a select few. As we heard from Secretary-General Guterres, the numbers of affected civilians suffering and dying from disease, malnutrition and impoverishment are larger than those who succumb to military operations. This is what is going on in 2023, and all of it can be avoided. As we have already heard, the destruction of infrastructure, health care, economies and food production causes untold suffering — a point well outlined by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

This year a quarter of a billion people are experiencing the most acute levels of hunger, caused by conflict. Together with Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh, I, like others, saw that recently when we visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And a great many of those suffering are women and girls. It is women who tend to eat last and eat least, or who end up not eating at all. In conflict, tragically, women and girls are also exposed to high levels of gender-based violence, including abhorrent sexual violence. As the United Kingdom's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, I assure the Council that I shall never accept it as an inevitable consequence of war, and nor should anyone. Working with our partners and friends, we will continue to support the survivors of sexual violence and help them secure justice and rebuild their lives.

Mr. Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has also unleashed other consequences, such as inflation and shortages of food, as we heard just now from the Minister for the Interior of Ghana. And that has had an impact on food security far beyond the continent of Europe. We therefore once again urge Russia to end its occupation and enable life-saving Ukrainian exports to continue in the future. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is an important part of that, and it must continue to operate.

There are three areas that the United Kingdom believes should be prioritized. First, we must do more to improve compliance with international humanitarian

law. And we must do more collectively to show that non-compliance is truly a red line. Parties to conflict must be held to account. We welcome initiatives in countries such as Somalia, where the Government is showing true leadership by strengthening the focus on civilian protection and stabilization and planning predeployment training in humanitarian law for its own troops. Even in the Sudan, where we have immense and grave concerns, we welcome the fact that the parties to the conflict are recognizing their responsibilities under international law and committing to allowing and facilitating humanitarian assistance. The United Kingdom reports voluntarily on its own compliance with humanitarian law, and we are encouraged to see many other States doing the same. To tackle conflict-induced hunger, we also need a greater focus on the relevant aspects of international humanitarian law. In that respect, we are also developing a legal handbook to achieve part of that objective.

Secondly, we can make better use of our early-warning systems. As we have already heard, resolution 2417 (2018) is our warning system for conflict-induced hunger, and reporting under it needs to be much quicker. The Security Council must act more promptly on the information it provides in order to save lives.

Thirdly, we must ensure coherence and coordination among our diplomatic, humanitarian, development and peace initiatives. Ultimately, we can deliver peace only with efficient and sustained diplomacy. And we will not be able to deliver sustainable peace without ensuring humanitarian support to guarantee sustainable livelihoods. For its part, the United Kingdom is steadfast in its commitment to supporting countries in recovering from conflict. In that regard, in London next month we will host the Ukraine Recovery Conference, which will also be engaging the private sector in terms of reconstruction.

Our well-intentioned words must be followed by swift action. Civilians caught up in conflict need protection now. They need food now. They need essential services, not tomorrow but today. And they need them to be delivered promptly. I assure the Council that the United Kingdom remains committed to supporting those facing the brutal effects of climate change, as we heard about from Ms. Mounkaila, and which drives conflict in many parts of the world. We have seen that quite starkly around the Lake Chad basin. Tomorrow, the United Kingdom will join the United States, Italy, Qatar and the Organization for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs to also focus attention on the crisis in the Horn of Africa. We must raise urgent humanitarian funds to save lives now. And we must also invest in long-term solutions to build resilience for the future, as we have again heard today from a number of representatives, including, importantly, those from across Africa.

But ultimately, together, as the United Nations, we have the tools and the means at our disposal to prevent and end conflicts today, restore stability, deliver accountability and justice, give hope back to civilians and give civilians their lives back. It is our moral imperative to do just that.

The President: I now call on the Permanent Representative of the United States of America and Member of President Biden's Cabinet.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I particularly want to thank Switzerland for making the pressing issue of conflict-induced food insecurity a centrepiece of its presidency. It is also a very high priority for the Government of the United States. I thank Secretary-General Guterres for being here with us today and for his sobering report to the Council. I also want to express my deep appreciation to President Spoljaric Egger of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Ms. Aïchatou Mounkaïla, President of the Network of Women-led Organizations of the Lake Chad Basin, for their presence with us today. I welcome the many Heads of State and Ministers to the Chamber. Their presence reflects the importance of the issue to all of us.

Today's briefing paints a dire picture of life for too many around the world — a world in which civilians continue to bear the burden of conflict. Earlier this month, I read this year's annual report on the protection of civilians (S/2023/345). It is a heartbreaking reminder of the enormous responsibility that the Council has to protect those in harm's way. In 2022, the United Nations recorded nearly 17,000 civilian deaths across 12 armed conflicts, a 53 per cent increase compared with 2021. Those numbers, of course, will go up in 2023, owing to the situations in Ukraine and the Sudan. In Ukraine alone, the United Nations recorded almost 8,000 civilian deaths, although the actual number is likely higher. That is the human cost of Russia's unprovoked brutal war of aggression in Ukraine, and we must never become numb to the senseless violence that one man, President Putin, has wrought.

Of course, the war has also had a devastating impact on vulnerable populations in countries far from Ukraine. Millions more people have been pushed into food insecurity as a result of that conflict. Why? Because Russia has used food as a weapon of war in Ukraine. And for months and months, Ukrainian grain was blocked from leaving the Black Sea. It is grain that many countries, especially in Africa and the Middle East, rely on. That is what makes the Black Sea Grain Initiative such a critical arrangement — one that has been a beacon of hope to the world.

Last year, the Black Sea Grain Initiative facilitated the safe export of more than 15 million tons of food, including wheat, used for humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen. We must ensure that this life-saving aid continues to flow to those in need, including women and girls, older adults, disabled persons and other marginalized groups that are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. And I particularly want to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts to keep this channel open.

The protection of civilians report also tells the bleak story of those who have been forced from their homes, unsure when or if they will be able to return. More than 100 million people have been forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, violence, persecution, human rights violations and abuses. Burkina Faso, Somalia, Burma and Ukraine face some of the fastest-growing displacement crises. And according to the United Nations Refugee Agency, fighting in the Sudan could displace an additional 1 million people.

This past weekend, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States announced that the Sudanese security forces have again agreed to a short-term ceasefire and humanitarian arrangement. We call for both parties to fulfil their commitments under the seven-day ceasefire and allow for unhindered humanitarian access. Aid workers must be guaranteed safe passage. I take note, sadly, that at least six humanitarian workers have senselessly been killed since this war started. Parties to the conflict must remove bureaucratic impediments in the Sudan that are delaying aid, and humanitarian cargo arriving in Port Sudan must be expedited and responsive to United Nations needs. The stakes could not be higher.

Five years ago, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2417 (2018) in response to growing levels of conflict-induced hunger. As a result of that resolution,

we now receive reports on instances where conflict is causing acute food insecurity or famine. But let us be clear. We are not getting all the information we need. The white notes the Council receives are irregular. Too often they are delayed. Now, more than ever, it is critical that we receive the white notes of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs twice a year. There must be a regular reporting cycle. That could depoliticize the issue and ensure that we have timely information to act on. Conflict and hunger must be at the top of the Council's agenda. That is why, when I started this job two years ago, I made that issue my country's first signature event in the Security Council (S/2021/250). A year later, after Russia's further invasion into Ukraine, we held an open debate on conflict and hunger during our May 2022 presidency (S/PV.9042). We must all do more to stamp out hunger and to save lives.

For our part, the United States remains the largest donor to the World Food Programme, providing more than half of all contributions. And tomorrow I am looking forward to joining the Horn of Africa Conference 2023 to shine a brighter light on the dire situation in the Horn.

At the same time, we must all recognize that no amount of aid will meet the needs of the world's most vulnerable if it cannot reach them. Too often, warring parties intentionally block humanitarian access, and too often the very people who dedicate their lives to saving others are targeted. Last year, more than 250 humanitarian and health-care workers were killed. Many others were injured, assaulted or kidnapped. The kidnapping of medical personnel continues across conflicts. Targeting aid workers is a clear violation of international humanitarian law and must be roundly and universally condemned.

We must do more together to protect civilians facing armed conflict. We must encourage regional actors to get more involved in peacebuilding efforts. We must build on the work of resolution 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021) and hold those who violate international humanitarian law to account. We must see our common humanity in those that are suffering. Let us do everything in our power to alleviate that suffering and to secure a more peaceful and just future for all.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Alain Berset, President of the Swiss Confederation and President of the Security Council

for convening this debate. I acknowledge the presence of Heads of State and Government as well as Foreign Ministers and other high-level representatives. I thank Secretary-General António Guterres, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, and the President of the Network of Women-led Organizations of the Lake Chad Basin, Ms. Aïchatou Mounkaïla, for their briefings.

I associate myself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger, which Ecuador has the honour to co-chair.

In another year, we will commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. What better way to do so than by stepping up efforts to protect civilians around the world now? Sadly, 2022 and, so far, 2023 reflect decline rather than progress. But that can be reversed, and the Security Council has a primary responsibility and role to play in those efforts.

Likewise, what better way to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2417 (2018), on hunger and conflict, than by strengthening its implementation? With more than 250 million people suffering from severe hunger as of 2022 in nearly 60 countries — about one-third of the States Members of the United Nations — focusing on food security is central.

Most of these cases involve crisis scenarios and armed violence, which is evidence of the link between conflict and food insecurity. We therefore reiterate the obligation of all parties to make every effort to ensure the proper functioning of food systems and markets, protecting food production, storage and distribution assets, as well as the water supply.

The Council must implement and ensure compliance with resolution 2573 (2021), on the protection of essential goods, co-sponsored by my country in 2021. We also reiterate the prohibition of attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless agricultural goods and crops. We condemn the practice of starving populations as a tactic of war, as well as the practice of blocking or attacking providers of humanitarian assistance.

During the Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which took place in Quito from 28 March to 1 April 2022, the Director-

General warned about the increase in hunger and food insecurity in my region.

That brings me to an issue that requires greater efforts on the part of the Council and the United Nations, as is the case of Haiti, which the President and other representatives have already mentioned this morning. Until relatively recently, Haiti was self-sufficient in food and even exported significant amounts of fruits, vegetables and proteins to other Caribbean islands until the 1980s. However, environmental devastation and now climate change have eroded its ability to produce food.

In addition, there is the violence of the gangs that have taken over areas essential for agricultural production in the Artibonite valley, which is known as the breadbasket of Haiti. The blocking of the transit of food trucks, the collecting of taxes and the stealing merchandise disrupt the city's markets, as do the harassment and rape of women who work in the sale and supply of food.

With 4.9 million Haitians — that is, half of its population — in conditions of acute food insecurity and the majority without access to essential services, if the Security Council does not decide to support the sending of a specialized force to support the Haitian National Police, regardless of which country leads it and regardless of whether it is carried out without the United Nations or in the form of a peacekeeping mission, the repercussions in Haiti and in the Latin American and Caribbean region will be unprecedented, including in terms of displaced persons and other precarious conditions of movement.

As reflected in the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians (S/2023/345), the number of people forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, human rights violations and abuses exceeds 100 million people, including from the Sudan, Myanmar, Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso and, recently, Ukraine, just to name a few countries. I reiterate the obligation of all parties not to hinder and instead to protect and provide access to essential services, such as health care, especially mental health care.

Today's meeting provides an opportunity for delegations and the Security Council itself to express their support for the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen the Black Sea Grain Initiative, with the objective of improving, expanding and automatically

renewing the initiative and ensuring its unhindered implementation for the duration of the conflict.

Ecuador reiterates its commitment to continue supporting the efforts of the United Nations, the ICRC and civil society to promote the effective implementation of international humanitarian law and to alleviate the impact and suffering caused by conflicts. We also support the role of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme. We will continue to defend in the Council the decisions that are necessary, such as humanitarian access at border crossings and within countries in conflict, as well as the full and effective participation of women in humanitarian efforts.

We stress the role of small-scale food producers as the backbone of food systems and call for the avoidance of trade restrictions and the release of strategic food reserves to alleviate food insecurity.

Every five seconds at least one person dies of acute hunger. That is almost 100 people since I began my speech, and more than 5,000 will have lost their lives by the end of today's debate, most of them in situations of violence and armed conflict.

I must therefore recall that the responsibility conferred on the Security Council by the Charter of the United Nations to act on behalf of the Member States of the Organization is justified in Article 24.1 of the Charter, with the sole objective of ensuring "prompt and effective action by the United Nations". Let us therefore strengthen the Council's efforts to overcome the challenges we are discussing today with concrete and effective actions.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate Switzerland on the initiative of this important debate, and convey the compliments of His Excellency Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic. I welcome the participation in this important meeting of the President of the Republic of Mozambique and the President of the Republic of Malta. I thank the Secretary-General for taking stock of the situation of civilians across the world. I also would like to thank the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for her exemplary commitment, within the mandate of the ICRC, to protecting civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to thank Ms. Aïchatou Mounkaïla for her enlightening briefing.

The persistence and scale of attacks against civilians in armed conflicts is reflected in the multiplicity of contemporary wars, which have become asymmetrical and urban, making it difficult to gather data on the number of dead and injured civilians. They are often caught up in the violence of armed groups and the response of national armies, and civilians are the primary victims of conflicts which are constantly increasing in different regions of the world, in particular in Africa.

In the Sahel, in the Great Lakes region and in the Horn of Africa, the figures from the barometers measuring security during conflict are alarming. In his annual report for 2018 (S/2019/373), Secretary-General António Guterres recorded the figure of 22,800 civilians killed or injured, based on figures from six countries at war, namely, Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, while indicating those figures were almost certainly underestimates of the actual number of civilian deaths and injuries. Today those figures have been utterly shattered by the chronic nature of numerous conflicts and the emergence of new deadly crises marked by the use of explosive devices in urban and rural areas, most of whose victims are civilians. The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/345) indicates a 53 per cent increase in 2022 compared to the previous year; while the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated last year that 306,000 civilians had been killed in 10 years of conflict in Syria.

That distressing fact is repeated on the battlefields without making a dent in the use of aerial bombardments or explosive devices, whose indiscriminate and devastating effects are well known and feared by all, and despite the clarity of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 which protects civilians during conflicts or in occupied territories.

In the Sahel region, most terrorist attacks target civilians. Terrorists have two cruel and shameful strategies: they starve civilians and attack schools. Attacks on livelihoods are used as a weapon of war by armed groups who steal and destroy villagers' property, burn their homes and steal their crops and food supplies with the stated objective of creating food shortages in order to subjugate the population and secure resources to finance their criminal activities.

In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, children are killed and maimed when they are not

forcibly recruited into armed groups. Schools and hospitals are destroyed or abandoned as the deadly fighting displaces millions of people within their own country or across the region.

The interaction between conflict and hunger has seen the threat of famine re-emerge in many areas, creating an exponential increase in people facing unsustainable levels of food insecurity. It is essential that the international community mobilize to take more effective action to address the problem comprehensively by tackling the root causes of conflict that disrupt food systems and markets and perpetuate the vicious cycle of hunger.

Combatants in every conflict must change their choice of weapons and tactics and refrain from obstructing humanitarian assistance, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

States must take concrete steps to protect medical personnel, including making sure that the rules of military engagement respect international humanitarian law. It is important that humanitarian assistance is never politicized and that the commitment of all parties, including armed groups, is ensured to this end. Confidence-building through dialogue is an effective way to achieve this and to reverse the trend of mistrust of humanitarians.

In the face of significant deterioration in belligerents' respect for humanitarian law, States must improve training, modernize policies to prevent harm to civilians, adopt better monitoring of victims, investigate incidents and hold those responsible for violations accountable. Accountability for violations must be systematic and universal.

The international public order is under unprecedented strain, standing at the opposite end of the spectrum from declarations of principle, resolutions and the proliferation of actors claiming to be engaged in civilian-protection activities. Clearly, the fine words and good intentions in forums such as this one are slow to be translated into reality on the ground. The reality is that in many parts of the world, men, women and children are being killed or raped, forced to flee their homes and abandon everything they own, living in a state of permanent fear. Hospitals are bombed and health workers are attacked.

Beyond the fact that civilians are deliberately targeted, the reality on the ground is that in wars people

disappear and thousands of prisoners of war are tortured or held in inhuman conditions. The number of missing persons in 2022 reached a frightening 29,000 according to the ICRC. In this context, again, international and subregional mechanisms must be strengthened.

The Security Council has made a number of important commitments to the protection of civilians in armed conflict through its relevant resolutions, including resolution 2417 (2018). We must ensure strict compliance with these commitments, which include providing greater access for humanitarian personnel to civilians in need of assistance; improving the safety and security of humanitarian personnel; improving measures to address the security needs of refugees and internally displaced persons; ensuring that the special protection and assistance needs of children in armed conflict are fully met; ensuring that the special protection and assistance needs of women in armed conflict are fully met; address gaps in the approach to disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and resettlement activities; address the impact of small arms, antipersonnel mines and unexploded remnants of war on civilians; combat impunity; develop further measures to promote the accountability of armed groups and non-State actors; and ensure that necessary resources are provided to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in forgotten emergencies.

Beyond these flagship commitments, the international community must continually reaffirm its commitment to the principles of international law based on justice, the peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for human dignity. We must continually reflect on how to better protect vulnerable civilian populations at the height of crises or in the immediate aftermath thereof, while acting decisively to protect civilians in armed conflict. State actors can take action by removing administrative barriers that impede humanitarian action. In this regard, regional organizations have an important role to play in efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians.

Among the factors that put civilians at risk in crisis situations is the phenomenon of the proliferation of non-State armed groups. When armed actors engage in crime or banditry, it is less easy to tell them about their obligation to protect civilians. Another factor is the constant evolution of the means and methods of warfare, which are sometimes accompanied by a complete disregard for the protection of civilians. We must work to ensure that respect for international humanitarian

law in situations of armed conflict remains at the heart of our mandate and mission, as evidenced by the way we work to protect and assist the victims of armed conflict.

At the same time, we must prevent conflict more than ever by addressing its root causes. The United Nations must continue to focus on the protection of civilians by keeping protection activities at the core of its peacekeeping mandates and improving the protection of certain categories of people, including women, children, and refugees and internally displaced persons. At the same time, humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC must be given the cooperation they need to continue their protection activities for civilians within their mandate and skills, based on a neutral and independent approach. In all cases, it is imperative that men, women and children in need of protection are placed at the heart of the action taken on their behalf. Women must be at the heart of strategies to combat hunger in conflict situations, whether in the management or distribution of food stocks or in the post-conflict reconstruction phase.

Translating these words and commitments into concrete and effective action must remain our constant challenge wherever the aspirations of civilian populations to live in safety and dignity are threatened.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania) (*spoke in French*): Albania commends Switzerland and you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate, which focuses on conflict and hunger and the immense challenges related to the protection of civilians. I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks and welcome the relevance of his report on the protection of civilians (S/2023/345). I also thank Ms. Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Mounkaïla for their briefings and recommendations on how to better use the tools available for the protection of civilians and humanitarian action.

(*spoke in English*)

In every conflict, in every situation in which lives are put in danger, it is civilians who pay the price. Protracted or new conflicts and outbreaks of violence anywhere serve as grim reminders of a pervasive lack of meaningful progress in upholding commitments to protecting civilians in armed conflict. Every time, the most vulnerable of them — women and children, people with disabilities and minorities — bear the brunt of terrible decisions taken by powerful men, by adults, in total disregard of life, of rights, of laws and of human dignity.

This is what is happening every day in Ukraine, with dramatic consequences for the civilian population, including civilian death, the destruction of vital infrastructure and massive displacement, as has been widely documented, including by the United Nations. This is what is happening nowadays in the Sudan, with entire communities trapped in crossfire, with few options for taking refuge. Elsewhere, in the Sahel, Yemen, Myanmar and Haiti, ongoing conflicts and instability continue to claim innocent lives and threaten the well-being of millions of people. The fragmentation and proliferation of actors, as we are seeing in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the privatization of warfare with private military and the use of mercenaries, which is a reality in many African conflict areas, as well as widespread availability of weapons and a continued disregard for international law, only exacerbate the enormous challenges to protect civilians.

The Security Council has considerably advanced the normative framework on the protection of civilians and humanitarian space through important resolutions and mandates. These are indeed important achievements, but, like everything else, these documents are just pieces of paper if they are not implemented, because there is little value in resolutions, mandates and other commitments when a permanent member of the Security Council is using missiles and kamikaze drones to hit residential areas, destroy schools, flatten kindergartens and demolish power installations, acting with impunity in broad daylight and for 16 months and counting.

It is not easy to talk about, let alone ensure, the protection of civilians when civilians are purposely taken as a target to instil fear with the hope of forcing them into surrender or submission. There is hardly any protection of civilians when millions of children are uprooted from their homes or displaced by senseless wars or, even worse, when thousands of them are forcefully deported and given up for adoption in another country.

Having laws that are disrespected, resolutions that are not implemented and mandates that exist only on paper is utterly damaging. It erodes trust in multilateralism and common efforts and leads to a loss of legitimacy and effectiveness. We welcomed the adoption of resolution 2601 (2021) and commend all States that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. Schools should be a safe place for children and youth to learn and thrive. But schools are systematically

destroyed in conflicts, and those responsible know very well what they are doing and seeking, because attacks on educational institutions and their military use result in death, destruction and loss of education, creating long-term negative consequences for entire communities. That is intolerable.

Seven years ago, resolution 2286 (2016) demanded an end to impunity for attacks on health care. It is not being implemented. In Ukraine alone, more than 800 attacks on hospitals, health workers and other medical infrastructure have been reported since the beginning of the Russian invasion. Almost 70 per cent of all attacks against health-care facilities in the world in 2022 — 763 attacks of 1,149 — have occurred in that sole country. Even where there is no war, cyberattacks against health-care facilities, which are on the rise, will disrupt services, with often dramatic consequences. We need to do better.

Resolution 2417 (2018) was a landmark step in recognizing the intersections of conflict and hunger, condemning the use of food insecurity and starvation as a tactic of war. According to the Secretary-General's report, more than a quarter of a billion people faced acute hunger in 58 countries and territories in 2022. That is close to one third of United Nations Member States.

Wars are always violent and harmful, but the destruction of resources can inflict terrible harm as well. The plundering of food supplies and the deliberate destruction of farms, livestock and other civilian infrastructure can have continued disastrous consequences for millions of people. When economic activities are severely disrupted, the very means of survival of entire populations are threatened. In turn, food insecurity, a sharp increase in the price of basic foodstuffs or a sudden lack of availability can trigger unrest. We are all familiar with the hardship felt worldwide, in particular in the developing world, after the beginning of the Russian war in Ukraine until the Black Sea Grain Initiative brought relief.

Protecting civilians has never been an easy issue, and there is no quick fix. The best and most secure way to protect civilians is to stop wars, to end conflicts and to break the cycles of violence. We are very far from that, so until we come to that point, we must make sure we deploy our best efforts to implement our decisions and respect the law. It demands leadership, strong political will and concerted actions.

We cannot just limit ourselves to reiterating calls on all parties to armed conflicts to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. There is no need to remind parties of their obligations — they are mandatory. Belligerents must abide by humanitarian laws or face the consequences. Therefore, we should do more. In our view, if we want to make a real impact in protecting civilians, we must enforce accountability and never tolerate impunity for violations. Failure to do so will only embolden perpetrators to continue without fear of consequences — but that is a no-go.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank you, Madam, for convening this important meeting. I would also like to thank the briefers for their insights.

Japan is deeply concerned by the frequent violations of international humanitarian law, notwithstanding the repeated resolve of the Security Council regarding the protection of civilians. Innocent civilians, especially vulnerable populations, including women, children, persons with disabilities, refugees and the internally displaced, should not suffer.

The death of even one civilian in conflict is intolerable. The number of civilian deaths had been decreasing for a few years until 2021, yet the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/345) shows that the number of civilian deaths in 2022 increased by more than 50 per cent as compared to 2021, with nearly half of the civilian deaths recorded in Ukraine. One civilian death is one too many, but it is distressing to learn that the toll would actually have decreased had it not been for Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Japan is also concerned about the higher toll of deaths and casualties recorded in Somalia, as well as the expected increase in civilian casualties in the Sudan.

In armed conflicts, attacks on civilians and their well-being are not the only issue. The dignity of human beings must be respected and the scarcity of food and water, as well as hindered access to health-care services, must also be fully addressed.

Food insecurity and armed conflict are closely linked and often give rise to human security concerns. The recent *Global Report on Food Crises 2023* points out that nearly one third of countries in acute food insecurity have been driven into calamity by conflicts. Furthermore, food insecurity in conflicts has often resulted in child malnutrition, which could be life-threatening and seriously stymie future development — even if the children survive. Resolutions

2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021) comprehensively address those issues, and Japan calls on all parties concerned to comply with those instruments.

Japan has been providing assistance through humanitarian agencies to address that human security challenge, including in Afghanistan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Yemen. Recently, we contributed \$8 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) for emergency food assistance in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has the highest number of people in acute food insecurity — Integrated Phase Classification 3 or above — in the world.

We also note the negative ramifications of the war against Ukraine, which have aggravated global food insecurity. Japan would therefore like to welcome the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in that respect. We commend the mediation efforts by the United Nations and the Government of Türkiye and look forward to the steady implementation of the Initiative.

Ensuring human security means safeguarding the dignity of people, which will lead to development and sustainable peace. With that in mind, the Government of Japan is committed to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. One example of our efforts in that regard is support for school meal programmes through UNICEF and the WFP. Continuing school meal programmes in conflict-affected settings fight food insecurity and help children to attend school, where children acquire necessary skills for their own future and develop their abilities to contribute to development and building peace in their own countries.

To conclude, let me reiterate Japan's unwavering commitment to protect civilians and their dignity, including through securing food and services indispensable to their survival.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We express our gratitude to today's briefers.

Food insecurity is a serious problem for the international community. Its causes are multifaceted and began long before the current situation. Not only armed conflicts, but also unilateral sanctions imposed by Western countries play an important role in that regard.

There is no justification for the use of hunger as a method of warfare. That rule was definitively enshrined in the Protocol Additional I to the Geneva Conventions relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time

of War. At the same time, however, it is important to remember that the emergence of that norm was a direct result of the blockade of Leningrad by German and Finnish forces when the city was surrounded with the aim of starving its millions of inhabitants to death. The use of starvation as a war tactic resulted in the deaths of over 600,000 people in Leningrad.

In contemporary armed conflicts, a particular threat is posed by terrorist and extremist groups that wage war with no respect whatsoever for the rules. Of especial concern is the continuing rise of the terrorist threat in the Sahara-Sahel region, including from Islamic State-Khorasan Province in Afghanistan, which targets members of religious and ethnic minorities.

In Syria and Yemen the situation is stabilizing, but even there the humanitarian situation remains difficult, as people still do not have sufficient basic necessities, including food and medicines. As far as Syria is concerned, it is clear, including from the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians (S/2023/345), that the main problems are the consequences of the illegal interference in the country's internal affairs and of its occupation. And that is a result of the so-called Global Coalition's air strikes and of the terrorist groups that have run rampant on the territory outside Damascus's control and that are responsible for most of the crimes that have been committed. At the same time, the civilian population has continued to suffer in the areas of Syria occupied by the United States and the forces it controls, including from the plundering of the country's natural resources. The horrific situation in the Rukban, Al-Hol and Roj camps on territory controlled by the United States has been going on for years. We urge the Secretary-General to continue to monitor that alarming situation closely and do more to bring it to international attention.

The grave humanitarian situation in Syria is due in large part to the fact that the United States and the European Union (EU) continue to impose illegal unilateral sanctions on the Syrians, with disastrous consequences for the civilian population. As the Secretary-General's report indicates, the sanctions continue to have a negative impact on the provision of humanitarian assistance, which people's lives in conflict areas often depend on. And that does not affect Syria alone. We call on the Secretary-General to continue investigating the issue. We note that the country-specific report on the situation in Syria, which we were promised by January, has not yet been issued.

We believe that hunger continues to be a method of the economic warfare that the West is waging all over the world. It arbitrarily strangles the possibilities for trading in foodstuffs. The situation surrounding the Black Sea Grain Initiative is a clear example of that tactic. We expressed our view of it at the 15 May Security Council meeting on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine (see S/PV.9321), and we will continue to draw attention to the real situation going forward.

To cite some numbers, the least-developed countries have received less than 3 per cent of all the shipments made within the framework of the Black Sea Initiative. Over the 10 months of its operation out of Ukrainian ports within the framework of the World Food Programme's humanitarian operations, that amounts to only 600,000 tons of foodstuffs, out of a total volume shipped of more than 30 million tons, an overwhelming percentage of which went to developed countries. We would like to draw particular attention to the ammonia supplies stipulated in the Istanbul agreements, which could ensure the shipment of 2.5 million tons of raw material, enough to produce 7 million tons of fertilizer. That amount of fertilizer would have the potential to produce food for 200 million people. Those shipments should have begun at the same time as the export of the Ukrainian products, but that has not been happening. Almost a year after the Black Sea Initiative was agreed, the supply of ammonia available on world markets is down by 70 per cent because cargoes have not shipped. As for the Russia-United Nations memorandum of understanding on the export of Russian foodstuffs, its implementation has barely started. While hypocritically claiming that there are no sanctions on exports of foodstuffs and fertilizer, the EU and the United States have refused to unblock SWIFT access to the Russian Agricultural Bank or to resolve the other logistical problems created by the sanctions that we have discussed repeatedly, including for shipping, insurance and agricultural equipment.

That is how Kyiv and its Western mentors are blocking exports of foodstuffs and fertilizer while blaming others for it. For our part, despite the dirty games being played with the agreements, we intend to continue to be guided by the importance of contributing to ensuring international food security, especially for developing countries, and by overcoming the artificial barriers erected by the West. Everything that our grain and fertilizer exporters have achieved is the result of their own efforts, and neither the United Nations nor

the West's so-called exemptions have anything to do with it. As in the past, our country continues to be one of the world's key suppliers of agricultural products. We have earned our reputation as a reliable and predictable partner, and we intend to continue to be one in the future.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome the participation of His Excellency Mr. Alain Berset, President of the Swiss Confederation, in today's meeting. I would like to thank Secretary-General Guterres and President Spoljaric Egger for their briefings. I also listened carefully to the briefing by Ms. Mounkaïla.

China has stated its position on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on many occasions in the Security Council. We appeal strongly to all parties to conflicts to adhere strictly to international law, including international humanitarian law, and to fulfil their obligations to protect civilians.

I will focus today on the issue of food security. Civilians are the main victims of armed conflict. Food crises exacerbate humanitarian situations and the plight of civilians. According to the most recent *Global Report on Food Crises*, about 250 million people are currently food insecure, while two thirds of those in acute food-insecure situations live in areas affected by conflict. Food is of primary importance in sustaining life, and food security relates to the very basic human right to life. The Security Council and the international community should therefore pay the greatest possible attention to the issue and take concerted action to find an integrated solution.

First, we must strive to achieve political settlements of hotspot issues. As long as conflicts persist, we cannot realistically talk about civilian safety and security, and hunger and poverty will be difficult to eradicate. We call on parties to conflicts to abide by resolution 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021), effectively fulfil their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, to protect civilians, prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups, including women and children, and ensure safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance. All countries should abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, promote cooperation and reject confrontation in order to create an environment conducive to peace. It is vital to persevere in resolving disputes through peaceful means, including dialogue,

negotiation and mediation, and to help countries in conflict achieve peace and stability without delay in order to create the conditions necessary for protecting civilians and ensuring food security.

Secondly, we must increase emergency assistance. Food crises result from a complex combination of interwoven factors. Our priority must be to take effective measures to meet the urgent needs that some countries are facing. We call on traditional donors to step up their assistance and provide additional emergency humanitarian assistance in the form of food and financing to countries in need. Assistance should not be seen as a lever for political gain. No conditions should be attached to it and there should never be any selectivity in the context of assistance. The requirements for all countries receiving humanitarian aid should be treated equally. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan also demands our attention. The United States has for years imposed a freeze on Afghanistan's overseas assets, which has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country. We urge the United States to listen to the urgent pleas of the Afghan people and the international community for the assets to be returned to the people as soon as possible so that they can be used to help overcome the country's humanitarian challenges, including its food shortages.

Thirdly, we must maintain the overall stability of the supply chain and international food prices. The renewal of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in the past few days will help to assure the continued flow of international food supplies, and China therefore welcomes that development. We commend Secretary-General Guterres and the relevant parties for their unremitting efforts to make that happen. We support a balanced, comprehensive and effective implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the memorandum of understanding on the export of Russian food products and fertilizer. We support the United Nations in playing a major role in that regard in order to remove the obstacles that Russia is facing in terms of its food and fertilizer exports.

We should point out that as a major international staple commodity, food has been highly financialized and monetized. The main driver of the current round of massive hikes in food prices has been various countries' adoption in recent years of extraordinary quantitative-easing monetary policies. We urge the relevant countries in designing their monetary policies to give serious attention to their spillover effects and

greater consideration to the interests of developing countries and to how their policies are received in order to prevent artificial distortions and abnormal fluctuations in food prices. We also firmly reject any weaponizing of economic interdependence, as well as engaging in unilateral sanctions and decoupling and disrupting international supply chains with the aim of harming countries' enterprises and attacking their infrastructure. Such actions not only endanger the security and stability of food markets but also violate international law, making the world more uncertain and less stable and plunging it into greater division and turmoil.

Fourthly, we should create conditions that support developing countries in solving their food problems. Many developing countries have rich agricultural resources and therefore all the potential they need to feed themselves. However, as long-standing victims of colonialism, they are plagued by a single-structure economy that has locked them into the very bottom of the international industrial chain, leaving them lacking the resources and conditions they need to be self-reliant and achieve food self-sufficiency. We must therefore promote the establishment of a more equitable and reasonable international economic order and provide more financial and technical support to developing countries to help them achieve agricultural transformation based on their individual situations, in order to improve their food security.

Developed countries' agricultural subsidy policies have severely distorted the international market for agricultural products and have acted as a disincentive for farmers in developing countries. We call on the relevant countries to change their subsidy policies in order to reduce their impact on the markets for developing countries' agricultural products. Major international food companies should also honour their social responsibilities by reducing their monopolistic control of agricultural resources, including seeds and the pricing of agricultural products. When it comes to supporting and helping developing countries, what matters is not who has the loudest slogans but who has taken more concrete actions.

Fifthly, we should strengthen international coordination to create synergies. The Security Council should take a balanced approach to security and development and pay particular attention to the agricultural, rural and farming-related issues of countries that are in the process of peacebuilding, as

well as help them strengthen their capacity-building in order to resolve their food crises at their source. The international food and agriculture institutions, United Nations development agencies and international financial institutions should leverage their respective advantages, mobilize broad international resources and deepen international cooperation so as to provide more support to post-conflict and developing countries in terms of financing, technology, training and management to help them to develop agriculture with their own characteristics based on their own conditions and create a diversified supply chain.

Climate change has become a major factor in declining food production. The United Nations should play its role as a main coordinator for promoting and deepening international action on climate governance. The developed countries should honour their commitments and historical responsibility and fulfil their financial obligations with regard to addressing climate change and helping developing countries enhance their resilience in terms of climate change and food security.

China has been a long-standing promoter of and contributor to international food security. In recent years we have provided emergency food aid to more than 50 countries to alleviate the urgent needs of millions of people. We take a dual approach of both transferring and generating sustenance by providing support in terms of farming technology, grain storage and processing infrastructures, and along with technologies related to innovations such as hybrid rice and Juncao technology that can help developing countries enhance their overall capabilities in terms of food production, supply and security. China will continue to work with other countries around the world to implement China's global development initiative and deepen our cooperation in terms of food security and poverty reduction to build a world free from war, conflict, hunger and poverty.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Ms. Mounkaïla for their briefings.

The picture is bleak. Civilian populations are still paying the highest price in conflicts. The sharp rise in the number of civilians killed in armed conflicts in 2022 is very worrisome. The protection of civilians is at the core of international humanitarian law and must be respected by all parties to armed conflicts.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. Some States and armed groups deliberately incorporate into their military strategies violations of international humanitarian law, such as attacks on civilians or civilian infrastructure and the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Violations of international humanitarian law increase people's suffering and multiply humanitarian needs. The violations committed by Russia in its war of aggression on Ukraine are tragic examples of that, as well as those committed by the Wagner Group, especially in the Central African Republic and in Mali, where the massacre in Moura in March 2022, documented in a recent report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those abuses demonstrate once again that that militia group's promises of security are pure propaganda.

France is also concerned about attacks and restrictions on humanitarian personnel, as has happened in Yemen, as well as in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have banned Afghan women from working for non-governmental organizations and the United Nations. Their decisions violate the rights of Afghan women and humanitarian principles and prevent populations in need from receiving assistance. Those practices must stop. The problem is not a lack of legal norms — an arsenal of legal provisions exists — but a lack of the political will needed to apply them. Violations of international humanitarian law must not go unpunished. Those responsible must be brought to justice.

The parties to a conflict have the primary responsibility for the protection of civilian populations and infrastructure. But we collectively, and the Council in particular, also have a responsibility to ensure that civilians are protected. France is concerned about the humanitarian consequences and the destruction caused by the uncontrolled and indiscriminate use of explosive weapons, especially by Russia and its supporters in Ukraine. That is why we have endorsed the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We urge Member States to join the Political Declaration with a view to achieving its universalization.

The protection of civilians is also inseparable from peacekeeping. Peacekeeping missions must continue to take steps to anticipate, neutralize and mitigate threats to civilians. The lives of millions of people

today depend on the ability of peacekeepers to carry out their missions. We must therefore ensure that the mandates of peacekeeping operations are adapted to their context and are respected. They must address all threats to civilians, including sexual and gender-based violence and violations against children, and they must fight impunity. Host States play an essential role in the implementation of those mandates.

In the face of violations of the most basic principles of international law, it is essential that we reaffirm our commitment to protecting civilian populations and property. France will continue to work to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. I invite all Member States to join the Call for Humanitarian Action launched by France and Germany in 2019, which has 53 signatories to date.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Gevorgyan (Armenia): I would like to express my appreciation to Switzerland for making the issue of the protection of civilians one of its priorities for its Security Council presidency. I thank Secretary-General António Guterres and Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for reflecting on the current and evolving challenges to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in particular the issues of addressing food insecurity and the protection of critical civilian infrastructure in conflict situations. The presence and the statement of President Alain Berset of Switzerland at today's debate demonstrate the high importance and urgency of those issues. I would like to acknowledge Switzerland's outstanding historic record in humanitarian affairs, as the birthplace of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Today, 160 years after the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross, its role remains even more pertinent in alleviating the suffering of civilians trapped in conflicts, bringing home prisoners of war and ensuring that humanitarian aid is accessible to all in need.

The deliberate targeting of the civilian population and objects indispensable for their survival, the disruption of supplies of essential goods, the denial of international humanitarian access and the use of starvation as a method of warfare and collective punishment constitute war crimes and are a threat to the lives and welfare of civilians living in conflict

zones. In that regard, we would like to underscore the critical importance of the full and unconditional implementation of the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. The Security Council plays a key role in ensuring the full adherence of States to their legally binding obligations under international humanitarian law.

Since 12 December 2022, Azerbaijan has imposed a blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law and the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020. For six months now, a population of 120,000 people, including 30,000 children, has suffered from a critical shortage of essential goods, including food and medical supplies. The humanitarian situation has been further exacerbated by a complete disruption of the gas and electricity supply and the deterioration of critical infrastructure, as well as the regular targeting of civilians conducting agricultural activities, in an attempt to deprive them of their means of subsistence and make their living conditions intolerable. For the past six months, people living in Nagorno-Karabakh have received only 7.5 per cent of their usual supplies of food and other essential goods, which means that more than 90 per cent of those supplies have not been shipped. Instead of adhering to the legally binding order of the International Court of Justice, issued on 22 February,

“to take all necessary measures to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions”,

the authorities of Azerbaijan installed a checkpoint on the corridor on 23 April, thereby openly taking responsibility for the illegal blockade and non-compliance with the Court’s order. Furthermore, Azerbaijan has continued to hinder the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation aimed at addressing the immediate life-saving needs of the population affected by the conflict, transferring patients for urgent treatment and delivering essential goods to remote settlements. So far it has not been possible to ensure access for the United Nations and its agencies to get involved on the ground, leaving Nagorno-Karabakh and its people off the radar of the United Nations for some time. The collective pledge to leave no one behind has yet to be fulfilled for them. All of those unlawful actions on the ground, accompanied by a decades-long policy of promoting anti-Armenian hatred and xenophobia, clearly indicate the genocidal intent of Azerbaijan, with a final goal of

the total ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In December last year, the Security Council discussed the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh caused by the closure of the Lachin corridor (see S/PV.9228). The situation on the ground has only deteriorated since then, inflicting further suffering on civilians. We hope that as the primary body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council will remain seized of the matter and ensure the dignity, physical security and fundamental human rights of the people, in line with its mandate and with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Finland.

Ms. Sumuvuori (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries — Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and, my own country, Finland.

Today, five years after the adoption of resolution 2417 (2018), armed conflict still continues to be the main driver of humanitarian needs and food insecurity, globally. The consequences of Russia’s war of aggression on global food security are devastating, especially for those most in need and for those who were already facing food insecurity.

Safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access is a prerequisite for effective humanitarian action, especially in situations of armed conflict. All parties to a conflict must fully comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That includes protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure and ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers. For aid to reach those most in need, ceasefires and security guarantees for humanitarian organizations are essential.

Addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services are especially important in protracted conflicts, in which needs are ever increasing and aggravated by climate change. Women play an essential role in food security and often face enormous challenges due to limited access to resources, information and education, and because of discriminatory structures and social norms. Consequently, women are more likely to experience poverty and income inequality, which can lead to higher rates of food insecurity.

The Nordic countries promote the protection of women and girls and the full realization of their rights at all stages of a conflict. We stress the importance of the prevention and elimination of gender-based and sexual violence and the promotion of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Furthermore, women should play a role in the design and delivery of humanitarian aid. The international community must support local groups, including women's groups that are the first to respond to conflict. Particular attention needs to be paid to people in vulnerable situations, such as women and girls who are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, as well as gender and sexual minorities and persons with disabilities. Protecting civilians is one of the key tasks of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Providing training for peacekeeping personnel on how to ensure the protection of civilians is critical to successfully implementing that mandate.

Access to water is a prerequisite for the protection of civilians and food security and for providing essential services. Modern warfare affects water sources and supplies by destroying essential infrastructure and by causing pollution and environmental degradation. Water is indispensable for the survival of the civilian population and has special protection under international humanitarian law. Water also plays an increasing role in geopolitical strategies, and pressures on transboundary basins are mounting. In many contexts, those effects may be exacerbated by climate change. Transboundary water cooperation often continues during armed conflict and can act as a driver for peace. We call on Governments to make necessary investments in providing access to water, particularly in areas already marginalized and prone to conflict. We call on the development community to invest in basic services and climate adaptation in fragile and conflict-prone regions.

Five years after the adoption of resolution 2417 (2018), the impact of conflicts on global hunger remains strong, and work remains to be done to change that trend. We welcome the attention of the Security Council on this important topic and remain committed to the objectives set forth in resolution 2417 (2018).

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. MacDougall (Canada): I thank Switzerland for convening today's important open debate, and I

thank the briefers for their thoughtful observations and insights.

Canada welcomes the Secretary-General's thorough and sobering report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2023/345).

Whereas many States follow their international humanitarian law obligations assiduously in order to protect the vulnerable from the conduct of hostilities, others pay lip service to international humanitarian law as a cover for vengeful tactics aimed at destroying the fabric of their enemy's civilian life. Historic cities such as Mariupol, Aleppo and Sana'a were once thriving metropolitan centres. Today large parts of them are reduced to uninhabitable mountains of concrete, steel and dust.

Civilians have been indiscriminately bombarded, ill-treated and starved as a weapon of war, and vulnerable people such as women, children, the elderly, the wounded and people with disabilities subjected to sexual violence are left to fend for themselves in the rubble. Certain parties' tactics have left millions food insecure, well beyond their borders. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is the most egregious example in all those respects.

However, the measure of success of international law is how violations are addressed collectively by States. In cases of grave violations, States have responded with targeted and effective sanctions, as well as the diplomatic and economic isolation of perpetrating parties.

We have witnessed the revitalization of independent international judicial institutions, including both the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada's approach is forward-looking, working with parties to armed conflict to strengthen their mechanisms for compliance with international humanitarian law. In 2018, Canada drafted a commitment by the Foreign Ministers of the Group of Seven to take practical steps to promote the effective implementation of international humanitarian law by State and non-State partners. The goal was to work with them to incorporate that commitment into their laws, education, field training and rules of engagement and to help them put in place structures to effectively address violations of same. Canada has put this into

practice in its dealings with parties to armed conflict in Iraq and Ukraine.

As the Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross have pointed out, the problems of food insecurity in armed conflict and the destruction of essential civilian infrastructure are rooted in the failure to respect that right.

United Nations Member States must make a concerted effort to ensure that international humanitarian law is systematically integrated into the operational practice of parties to armed conflict,

protecting the most vulnerable. If the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack were respected in good faith, the worst consequences of armed conflict on the civilian population would be avoided.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 12.35 p.m.