

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 1 May 2023 from the Permanent Representative  
of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the  
Secretary-General**

I have the honour to inform you that, during the presidency of Switzerland, the Security Council plans to hold a high-level open debate on the theme of “Ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in conflict: addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services” in connection with the item entitled “Protection of civilians in armed conflict”. The open debate will be held on Tuesday, 23 May at 10 a.m. and will be chaired by the President of the Swiss Confederation, Alain Berset.

Please find attached a concept note to guide discussions on the topic of the debate (see annex). I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**  
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations



## **Annex to the letter dated 1 May 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

[Original: English]

### **Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on the theme “Ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in conflict: addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services”, to be held on 23 May 2023**

#### **1. Introduction and objective**

The annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict will focus, among others, on conflict-induced food insecurity and related challenges, such as the protection of critical civilian infrastructure and essential services. As President of the Security Council for the month of May 2023, Switzerland will hold a high-level open debate to discuss how to address these intertwined challenges.

The meeting will provide an opportunity for the Security Council and the wider membership to take stock of the implementation of Council resolution [2417 \(2018\)](#) pertaining to conflict and hunger five years after its unanimous adoption. Given the grim situation of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, the session will also look at the challenges related to the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as those essential for food production and distribution, water and sanitation, energy and health care, and other related civilian infrastructure, and of essential service personnel, as envisaged by the Council in its resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#).

**Member States are thus invited to share their views on challenges and good practices, including preventive and preparedness measures on how to better ensure the survival, the security and the dignity of the civilian population in times of conflict.** The open debate will also highlight concrete steps to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to armed conflicts, and measures to be taken by the Security Council, Member States, the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other actors.

#### **2. Background**

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts. The direct and indirect effects of hostilities on food systems and water infrastructure, and the lack of access to safe water, sanitation and health care, as well as displacement, are contributing to increasing levels of malnutrition, acute food insecurity and the probability of famine. In many of the most vulnerable contexts, these outcomes may be exacerbated by the adverse effects of climate change. Food insecurity is at an unprecedented height, with conflict remaining the main driver of food insecurity. According to the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 70 per cent of the world’s population experiencing acute hunger is in conflict-affected areas.<sup>1</sup>

Respect for international humanitarian law is crucial to the prevention of hunger in conflict situations and the protection of the civilian population and civilian objects in general. It mitigates the negative impacts of armed conflict on civilians, in

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<sup>1</sup> World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “Hunger hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity – October 2022 to January 2023 outlook” (Rome, 2022).

particular in the conduct of hostilities. For example, the disruption of agricultural production and distribution systems can cause abandonment of crops and livestock and result in food shortages. Importantly, international humanitarian law prohibits the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. It grants special protection to objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

Rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access must also be facilitated and allowed according to international humanitarian law. This is particularly important when parties to armed conflicts are unable or unwilling to meet the needs of the civilian population. Furthermore, the protection of the natural environment in armed conflicts as a civilian object is also crucial to the prevention and mitigation of the impacts of conflict on food insecurity.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a key aspect of international peace and security. The Security Council has an important responsibility in ensuring the survival, the security and the dignity of civilians in conflict. Conflict and hunger remain high on the agenda of the Council since its adoption of resolution [2417 \(2018\)](#), in which the Council recalled the link between armed conflict and food insecurity, including the threat of famine, and condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. The Council also highlights the pivotal role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and the need to increase their role in related decision-making.

In 2021, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#), in which it recognized the interconnectedness of certain essential services and condemned, among others, unlawful attacks against and misuse of objects critical to the delivery of essential services to the civilian population, including those services that are key for the provision of water and sanitation, energy, and food production and distribution. The Council also condemned the unlawful denial of humanitarian access resulting in the deprivation for the civilian population of objects indispensable to their survival. Furthermore, it recognized the importance of those objects for the survival of the civilian population, hence confirming their specific protection under international humanitarian law.

These resolutions are important milestones, shedding light on the urgent need to better protect civilians and ensure their survival in security and dignity.

### 3. Guiding questions

- How can the Security Council, Member States and all parties to conflict promote a more systematic implementation of existing frameworks and instruments, including resolution [2417 \(2018\)](#) and resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#), to address conflict-induced food insecurity and to protect essential services?
- What other relevant risks does the Security Council need to address to enhance food security and the protection of essential services?
- What are the challenges but also the good protection practices, including preventive and preparedness measures to ensure the survival and dignity of the civilian population during armed conflict?
- What is the role of women in addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services? How can the agency of women be leveraged, be it as duty bearers or as affected individuals?
- How can Member States, the United Nations system, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations contribute to an enhanced respect for international humanitarian law in relation to the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the

civilian population, including essential civilian infrastructures, while also tackling food insecurity?

#### **4. Participation and format**

The meeting will be held in the format of an open debate at the level of Heads of State and Government. It will be chaired by the President of the Swiss Confederation, Alain Berset.

Member States wishing to participate in person should inscribe their names on the list of speakers through the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. A letter addressed to the President of the Security Council, duly signed by the Permanent Representative or the Chargé d'affaires a.i., requesting to participate in accordance with rule 37 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, must be uploaded to the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. Inscription for said meeting will open on **18 May 2023 at 9.30 a.m.**

The presidency encourages the participation of as many Member States as possible. Statements or interventions should, however, not exceed three minutes.

#### **Briefers**

- Secretary-General of the United Nations
  - President of the International Committee of the Red Cross
  - Civil society representative (tbc)
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