



Security Council

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Letter dated 27 May 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith copies of the briefings provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Peter Maurer, President, International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Orzala Nemat, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, Estonia, France, India, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (on behalf of Kenya, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict convened on Tuesday, 25 May 2021.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for this video-teleconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, the European Union, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Malta, Myanmar, Nepal, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, San Marino, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefing and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Zhang Jun**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

Last year, the Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire so that the world could focus on ending the pandemic and putting people on a path to sustainable recovery. Despite support for this in many places, deadly conflicts have continued in Syria, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. New ones broke out or got worse, for example in Ethiopia, Mozambique and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In many countries, conflict has made it more difficult to control the spread of the virus and care for infected people.

We have all seen multiple reports of atrocities. In Afghanistan, a high school was attacked earlier this month, killing and injuring dozens of civilians, including schoolgirls. In Ethiopia, we have heard shocking reports of mass rapes and killings. In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, the escalation of hostilities killed and injured scores of civilians and caused extensive damage to homes and vital infrastructure.

Last year, conflicts contributed to a rise in the number of forcibly displaced people, bringing the total to 80 million by mid-year. The year 2020 also saw a large reduction in the number of internally displaced people who were able to return to their homes. At the same time, insecurity, sanctions, counter-terrorism measures and administrative hurdles hindered humanitarian operations. The pandemic added new access woes, with flight suspensions, border closures, quarantine measures and lockdowns.

My remarks today will focus on five areas highlighted in the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians (S/2021/423), which was released last week: the interplay between conflict and hunger; the effects of using explosive weapons in populated areas; protection of the environment; protection of medical care, on which I note we now mark five years since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016); and strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and accountability for serious violations.

First, with regard to conflict and hunger, the threat of famine re-emerged last year, including in north-east Nigeria, parts of the Sahel, South Sudan and Yemen. By the end of 2020, nearly a hundred million people faced crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity as a result of conflict. That was up from 77 million the year before.

Conflict causes acute hunger in direct and indirect ways. It displaces civilians from their agricultural land, grazing areas and fishing grounds. In Nigeria, last year, at least 110 farmers were killed in an attack on a rice farm. In Ethiopia's Tigray region, people have been displaced, crops have been destroyed and looted, and food and other relief has been blocked. As required under resolution 2417 (2018), I am today sending the Security Council a written update on the evolving situation in northern Ethiopia.

Conflicts also disrupt commercial food systems and markets, and parties to conflict destroy food stocks. Prices rise and families are less able to buy food. Member States need to take more effective action to tackle these challenges. This starts by finding political solutions to conflicts, ensuring respect for the rules of war, and addressing the economic crises that fuel and flow from fighting.

As Council members know, the Secretary-General has strengthened the famine prevention efforts of the United Nations through the creation of a high-level task force that is working to ensure that coordinated, high-level attention is given to the countries most likely to fall into famine and to mobilize support for the most vulnerable people.

Secondly, with respect to the use of explosive weapons in towns and cities, almost 90 per cent of the people killed when explosive weapons are used in urban areas are civilians. That compares to less than 20 per cent when these weapons are used in rural areas. We saw high numbers of civilian casualties resulting from the use of these weapons last year in countries that include Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

These weapons also inflict a devastating toll on essential civilian infrastructure. In Yemen, they have disrupted almost every essential resource or public service, including water, electricity, sanitation and health care. Fighting parties must change their choice of weapons and tactics. The Secretary-General has repeatedly called on parties to conflict to avoid using wide-area explosive weapons in populated areas.

Thirdly, the Secretary-General's report highlights the impact of conflicts on the environment. In Iraq, air strikes destroyed agricultural land and caused wildfires, including in areas with rich biodiversity and species at risk of extinction. In northern Syria, deteriorating infrastructure led to oil spills polluting water needed for farming, health and basic hygiene.

The origin of many conflicts is found partly in environmental issues, especially those related to water. Water stress is growing in many places already affected by conflict. I predict that members of the Council will be dealing with more of the consequences of this phenomenon in the years ahead.

Fourthly, I turn to attacks on medical care. The report addresses this topic in some detail. Medical personnel, transportation and facilities continue to come under attack. Doctors and nurses are threatened, abducted and killed. Facilities and medical-transport systems including ambulances are destroyed and damaged. The wounded and sick are denied access to care.

Last year, attacks on health care across 22 conflict-affected countries killed 182 health workers, with the highest numbers in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Syria. Four days ago, a dedicated South Sudanese doctor working for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) was killed inside a health facility in South Sudan's Unity state. At almost the same time, a few kilometres away, an IRC convoy, including an ambulance, carrying 10 aid workers, was shot at by unknown gunmen. The humanitarian staff managed to escape the attack. Health workers also faced kidnapping, injury, assault and intimidation.

In Myanmar alone, 109 incidents of violence against health care were documented in a two-month period this year, accelerating the collapse in the public health-care system when many people have needed it most.

In some conflicts, counter-terrorism measures criminalize the provision of medical care to members of terrorist-designated groups and even to people living under their control. This has led to the detention, prosecution and imprisonment of medical personnel.

The consequences on health care are catastrophic, depriving millions of people of life-saving care, and severely reducing the treatment of diseases like cholera, measles and the coronavirus disease.

When hostilities worsened in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, over one-third of health facilities were damaged or destroyed, and health workers fled. This left thousands of people without a nurse or doctor.

In short, when medical care stops, lives are lost.

Some States have taken practical steps to protect medical staff and facilities and make sure the wounded and sick can receive care. These include ensuring

military targets are far from medical facilities; taking precautions, including issuing warning of military action; refraining from using medical facilities to support the military effort; and, crucially, ensuring that military rules of engagement respect international humanitarian law.

Drawing on best practices and on the recommendations made in resolution 2286 (2016), the Secretary-General calls on States and armed forces to expand on these efforts. Parties to conflict need to improve analysis and tracking of allegations of harm. And I reiterate our call for all humanitarian and medical activities to be excluded from counter-terrorism and sanctions measures.

This brings me to the fifth point — ensuring that the behaviour of belligerents complies with international humanitarian law. I have seen a significant deterioration in this area, from States and non-State armed groups alike, in my nearly four years as Emergency Relief Coordinator. Unless we the international community focus our energies on confronting the way belligerents behave in conflict, we will see the scale of humanitarian need continue to increase just as it has over the past four years.

It is possible to make progress. States can improve the training of their forces, modernize policies to avoid civilian harm, adopt a more consistent approach to tracking and recording civilian casualties, investigate incidents when they occur and hold those guilty of violations to account.

International humanitarian law should be incorporated into national law, military manuals and rules of engagement. States should leverage respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in political dialogue and through sanctions, a more responsible approach to arms sales and the training they provide.

It is also possible in many circumstances to improve the behaviour of non-State armed groups, though it is important to recognize the very real challenges in this area, especially in respect of those groups who refute international humanitarian law and the role of humanitarian agencies as part of their twisted ideologies. We all — States Members of the United Nations and humanitarian agencies in particular — need a more effective approach to tackling this. Many current efforts are counterproductive and exacerbate harm to civilians.

Finally, I want again to emphasize the crucial importance of accountability. If war crimes go unpunished, things will get worse. Accountability for violations must be systematic and universal. What is not punished is encouraged. This takes political will on the part of Member States to investigate and prosecute allegations of serious violations whenever they occur. We have the laws and the tools to protect civilians from harm in armed conflicts; it is time that all States and parties to conflict applied them.

Annex 2**Statement by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer**

I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to brief the Council and to China for convening today's open debate.

Since my last briefing on the protection of civilians (see S/PV.8596) we have seen global fragility deepen due to the converging challenges of armed conflict, the pandemic, economic downturn, rising inequality and climate change.

In conflicts, we are witnessing vicious cycles of violence with political, ideological, ethnic, religious and criminal motivations intersecting, and violations of basic norms leading to massive protection challenges.

At the macro-level, we are struggling with issues such as the fragmentation and proliferation of actors, the privatization of warfare, with private military and security companies entering battlefields, the widespread availability of weapons, and urban violence.

War and violence within and between States and non-State armed groups becomes even more complex with inter-community violence spreading in many contexts.

The result is that individuals and local communities face elevated risks and barriers. Those already at the back of the queue — women, children, people with disabilities, minorities, the elderly — are being hit hardest and increasingly marginalized.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recently released its first comprehensive report showing the systemic impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on communities shouldering the double burden of war and disease. I would like to focus my briefing today on these observations, in the light of the serious and compounding protection challenges that are emerging.

It is obvious to all of us that the pandemic has not solely been a health crisis; it has intensified existing protection needs and created new concerns. We have seen the impacts on children: families kept apart, shuttered schools, routine health care and vaccinations halted.

We have seen the impacts on migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons: excluded from State-run health-care and social-protection systems; border “push-backs”; and the denial of the legal right to seek asylum.

We have seen the impacts on people in detention, where a lack of due process and judicial procedures put lives — and hope — on hold, and where deadly diseases can spread rapidly in chronically overcrowded and unfunded facilities.

We have seen the impacts on those grieving and the importance of upholding the dignity of the dead during an emergency, the global mental health crisis and the silent suffering of families of people gone missing in conflict.

While the need for robust health-care systems has perhaps never been greater, paradoxically, health care is under attack. Five years since the Security Council demanded an end to impunity for attacks on health care, our observations in 40 countries affected by conflict show that attacks on health care have gone unabated and health-care delivery continues to be impeded due to disregard for international humanitarian law. We have also seen an increase in cyberattacks against health-care facilities.

Clearly not enough is being done to protect health-care workers and medical facilities to translate resolution 2286 (2016) into action.

We cannot allow hospitals to be bombed with impunity, the ill and injured to die needlessly, diseases to spread unchecked or life-saving vaccines to be reserved for the privileged.

This global crisis brings with it a compelling imperative for change. Collective action to look after the most vulnerable people in societies has never been more vital.

We need a fundamental change of behaviour of belligerents in conflicts. We need political solidarity and investment in basic infrastructure and services. We need better protection for civilians and more substantive and broader support for humanitarian action. This is the urgent task for Council members: we have seen how the decisions made here — or the lack of decisions — can have enormous and devastating humanitarian consequences around the world. Today I bring to the Council's attention five key calls that we believe will strengthen the protection of civilians.

First, parties to conflict, and all those with influence over them, must respect international law and protect civilians. Respect for international humanitarian law is a fundamental but forgotten part of the narrative on COVID-19. The pandemic has shown us the corrosive effects on societies when international humanitarian law is violated. The destruction of health systems and essential services has led to large-scale displacement and limits people's ability to withstand future shocks.

Additionally, we call for rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to populations in need. While neutral and impartial humanitarian organizations must respect national and international legal rules, States have the obligation to facilitate their work, not hinder them with dubious and vague references to sovereignty and security.

Secondly, we ask States to prioritize the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) by taking concrete steps to protect health care. States supportive of that resolution should lead by example and implement measures, including national policies to ensure the translation of international frameworks into concrete protective measures and military doctrine and practice that protects health care in conflict, including in partnered military operations.

Thirdly, and more precisely, we expect members of the Council to act more decisively to improve their own action and leverage their special relationship with allies, partners and proxies to respect international humanitarian law. We will not see better respect of the law if members of the Council continue to call out others while, at the same time, excluding themselves and their allies and proxies from critical review. Scrutinizing one's own military operations and leveraging relationships in order to improve international humanitarian law is critical.

Today, no one fights wars alone. Through arms transfers, training, equipment, advice, assistance, intelligence cooperation, capacity-building and information and logistical support, members of the Council engage directly or indirectly in military operations around the world where, at times, we see violations of international humanitarian law.

Simultaneously, little consideration is offered on how respect for the law can be enhanced by improving a State's own operations and leveraging influence to foster respect for the law and protection outcomes for civilians and others not fighting. In a recent study entitled "Allies, Partners and Proxies", the ICRC has proposed a framework for strategic reflection on how to minimize risks of violations and maximize protection outcomes in such situations.

We stand ready, bilaterally and multilaterally, confidentially and diplomatically, to work with all Council members to achieve better outcomes.

My fourth call is to encourage States to invest in local responses and prioritize community engagement and trust-building before, during and after crises. We have seen the dangers when communities fail to trust the measures implemented by governments during COVID-19 and we have seen the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation and rumours, which can result in violence against health workers and first responders.

Inclusive responses should also include equitable access to vaccines and medicines, both between and within countries, so that no population is excluded, for example those living in areas controlled by non-State armed groups. That is critical not only to live up to ethical imperatives and overcome the pandemic, but also to prevent further entrenchment of the systemic weaknesses revealed by the crisis.

Fifthly, we call on States to strengthen health, water and sanitation services and to protect them at all times in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law. The poor state of essential services may have accelerated the trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic but, on the flipside, the ICRC also sees how the rehabilitation of infrastructure and capacities pays dividends in a major emergency.

Strengthening essential services in conflict-affected areas is not only a technical matter — it requires political support. The ICRC was pleased to see that, last month, under Viet Nam's presidency, all 15 members of the Council co-sponsored resolution 2573 (2021), urging all parties to armed conflicts to protect civilian infrastructure. We congratulate members of the Council on the unanimous adoption of that resolution and we call now for its full implementation.

The ICRC continues to call on all parties to armed conflicts to avoid the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects. We strongly support the ongoing diplomatic process to adopt a political declaration to strengthen the protection of civilians against the use of such weapons.

With strong political will, we can build on the good practices and progressive ideas emerging from the pandemic into longer-lasting policies to address individual and systemic drivers of vulnerability. Those practices include, for example, expanded access for asylum seekers, refugees, other migrants and the internally displaced to social safety nets and social protection systems, or the increased use of non-custodial measures to decongest prisons and the use of technology to facilitate contact between detainees and their families.

There is much we can do and so much of that depends on political support. The ICRC offers its expertise and advice to States and we look forward to engaging with Council members further.

Annex 3**Briefing by the Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Orzala Nemat**

It is my great pleasure to address the Council on behalf of Afghanistan from both an Afghan and a civil society perspective.

Let me first briefly elaborate on what we mean by civil society in Afghanistan. In the post-2001 context, the Afghan civil society has emerged and evolved as result of different forms of aid and assistance and thanks to an opening environment for freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Afghan civil society, in today's context, is therefore an amalgamated form of classic and modern civil society, where some with religious educations and knowledge and others with secular educations and knowledge have joined hands to help provide public services to their people.

Afghan civil society is working on promoting civic education, community development and peacebuilding, women's rights and the protection of victims of war and violence, agriculture and farming and environmental issues, as well as advocating for legal reforms and many other policy matters. The role of the media and women-led organizations, among other segments of civil society, have become more salient over the past two decades. Civil society therefore consists of community organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, voluntary groups and individuals, women's organizations, unions, social organizations, cultural organizations and individuals who advocate for religious enlightenment, human rights, women's rights, freedom of speech, accountability, peace, justice and so on.

My remarks today focus on the protection of civilians in Afghanistan. There is enough evidence to say, with confidence, that protracted years of conflict and violence have turned Afghanistan into one of the worst countries for its ordinary civilians and health workers. That is because nearly all parties to the conflict often do not follow the Geneva Convention or any other universal conventions or declarations, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to ensure and prioritize the protection of civilians.

On the contrary, civilians are the prime target of Taliban attacks and are used as protection shields by insurgent groups. Sadly, there have been some incidences of Government forces bombing civilian targets. Not even the international military are exempted from such acts. The bombing of the Doctors Without Borders hospital in 2015 is just one example.

The first quarterly report of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for 2021 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict documents 1,783 civilian casualties, with 573 killed and 1,210 injured — a 29 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2020. Of particular concern is the 37 per cent increase in the number of women killed and injured and the 23 per cent increase in child casualties compared with the first quarter of 2020.

Anti-Government elements continued to be responsible for the majority — 61 per cent — of all civilian casualties in the first three months of 2021, while pro-Government forces continued to cause approximately one-quarter — 27 per cent — of total civilian casualties.

In comparison to last year, this year's increase shows that the Taliban is responsible for 43.5 per cent of all civilian casualties and the Afghan National Army responsible for 17 per cent. Last year, UNAMA registered 12 acts of violence targeting health-care workers between 11 March and 23 May. Eight of them were attributed to the Taliban, while Afghan forces were responsible for three. But the most horrific attack on a maternity hospital, which left 24 dead, is still unresolved, with no group claiming responsibility for it.

We therefore call on the Security Council to bring these numbers to the direct attention of all parties to the conflict and ask for practical mechanisms to be put in place to stop the targeting of civilians during fighting.

An intense wave of targeted killings of civil society members— such as women leaders, journalists, religious scholars and even female vaccinators — has caused serious threats and created an atmosphere of terror in our cities and districts. Within the past two weeks alone, at the end of February and the beginning of March, seven women were targeted in eastern Nangarhar province. First, three female journalists were shot dead, then a female doctor's rickshaw was blown up, and that was followed by the assassination of three young female vaccinators in Jalalabad city, in eastern Afghanistan.

Fatima Khalil, a human rights activist, was assassinated in a magnetic improvised explosive device (IED) attack in Kabul. Malalai Maiwand, a television reporter, was murdered in December, five years after her mother, an activist, was killed. Yama Siawash, Nemat Rawan, Ilyas Dayee and many other male journalists have been targeted in different parts of the country. Freshta Kohistani, a 29-year-old women's rights and democracy activist; Zakia Herawi and Qadria Yasini, judges in the Afghan Supreme Court; Basira, age 20, Semin, age 24, and Negin, age 24, were killed while administering polio vaccines to children. Yousuf Rasheed, a civil society leader, was killed while heading to his office. These are only some of the names among many other women and men who worked and lived as civilians and were targeted by these assassinations.

In the most recent wave of attacks during the holy month of Ramadan, a guesthouse that hosted university students and was close to a health clinic was targeted in Pul-e-Alam, in Logar province. The car bomb killed over 30 people and injured dozens, mostly students and patients, in the nearby health centre, which was destroyed. This tragedy was followed just a few days later by a major pre-Eid strike on the Sayed Ul-Shuhada High School for girls, in the west of Kabul, that killed over 85 girl students and injured hundreds. Attacks on religious and ethnic minorities are among the most ruthless tactics and approaches used by insurgent groups to attract certain attention. Unfortunately, the common reaction to all these incidents is limited to messages of condemnation, nationally as well as globally. No systematic and independent investigation is undertaken to identify the masterminds and planners of such ruthless attacks.

Some of these attacks have been carried out and/or claimed by a group called Da'esh, whose members and tactics in using such a high level of carnage and violence can be traced back to the Taliban's claimed attacks. The Taliban, however, sometimes denies playing a role in such incidents, which raises the question: On whose orders are our ordinary civilians being targeted?

As the Taliban continues to deny responsibility for attacks and the Government's capacity remains weak, and as the civilian losses are used as an element of psychological warfare by both sides, Afghan civilians need to know that there is international attention focused on the issue and an international push for accountability. I therefore call on the Security Council to support an internationally mandated independent investigation of atrocities against civilians in Afghanistan

Mines and IEDs are another major issue that Afghans are facing as part of this armed conflict. The insurgent groups keep planting land mines in civilian areas, which take too many lives on a daily basis. According to the United Nations, there were 150 land-mine casualties every month in 2019 in Afghanistan. During the first two decades of war in Afghanistan, an estimated minimum of 10 million mines were planted; however, for the past two decades there have been no data on the number of IEDs or mines in the country. In southern Kandahar province, for instance, hundreds

of mines were planted in the pomegranate orchards and people's houses were even burnt down at the peak of the harvesting season last autumn, affecting not only people's lives but also their livelihoods. As we speak now, in Helmand province and other parts of the southern region, local farmers' wheat harvesting fields have been burnt and planted with mines.

If the Taliban continues to follow these tactics of attacking civilians and their livelihoods and using suicide bombings, IEDs and landmines against ordinary and local civilian infrastructure, then are the Security Council and other United Nations State Members not giving them legitimacy by meeting with them even though they keep using such approaches?

International support for the national security forces needs to include key war-related conventions and humanitarian principles in order to maximize the protection of civilians during the military operations and to set up a mechanism that can hold violators accountable.

Poverty levels are also increasing due to ongoing violence and the spread of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in the country. Nearly 11 million people in Afghanistan are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity due to conflict, according to ReliefWeb International. COVID-19, high food prices, rampant unemployment between March and May 2021 — the lean season in most parts of the country — and the displacement of people due to natural disasters and armed conflict are key drivers of food insecurity. This certainly indicates the urgency of maintaining and continuing humanitarian and development aid in the years to come, in spite of the military withdrawal of the international forces.

Afghans across the country strongly believe that the only solution to ending current cycle of violence and armed conflict is through peace talks. However, no one is satisfied with the current peace process, which is in dire need of urgent boosting. Between now and the 11 September deadline for international military troop withdrawal, all major members of the Security Council, in particular the United States, have huge leverage to put stronger pressure on the Taliban and the rest of the political elites in Afghanistan to come to an agreement on a political settlement, with an immediate ceasefire as a first step.

We are pleased that the Secretary-General has appointed a veteran diplomat, Jean Arnault, as his Personal Envoy on Afghanistan and Regional Issues. I am sure that his long-standing work in support of the peace process and regional cooperation and his deep understanding of political and security developments in Afghanistan will help him play a key role in the peace process in Afghanistan. A mediator's role is key to moving forward and ensuring that the voices and concerns of all Afghans, in particular the different segments of civil society, are part of this process.

Civil society organizations, and women leaders in particular, are highly organized in articulating their messages for peace, prosperity and the inclusivity of the peace process at different levels. The Afghanistan Mechanism for Inclusive Peace is a platform for bringing the different segments of civil society organizations together for consultation on different issues related to peace building. Women's advocacy groups are focusing on local grass-roots activism through initiatives that unite their voices as well as international advocacy to mobilize support for an immediate ceasefire. All have one message — end the bloodshed and stop this vicious cycle of violence and targeted killings by declaring a comprehensive ceasefire. Local organizations are trying their best to negotiate with parties to ensure that the delivery of basic services is reaching people in rural and urban areas. Volunteers are active in promoting girls' education in southern and eastern Afghanistan, where most access has been limited.

These are examples and proof that Afghans are awakening and risking their lives to preserve key humanistic and democratic values. They also demonstrate the country's determination not to surrender to the forces of darkness and ignorance. It is now time for our international allies to support us in achieving a lasting peace. Since the war has been sponsored and supported internationally, the peace definitely requires strong and practical steps, through joint and collaborative efforts, if it is to be achievable.

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

[Original: Chinese and English]

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, President Maurer and Ms. Nemat for their briefings.

The situation reflected in the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/423) and in today's briefings is worrisome and thought-provoking. I would like to pay tribute to those humanitarian workers, especially medical personnel, who have contributed selflessly in the flames of war. They do a lofty job and should be fully respected and protected.

China pays great attention to the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and supports the international community in strengthening efforts to address the root causes of conflict, advance the political settlement of conflicts and disputes, and ensure that all parties to conflict effectively abide by international law, in particular international humanitarian law, and that the resolutions of the Security Council are effectively implemented. Therefore, China has made the protection of civilians in armed conflict one of the priorities of the Council's work for this month.

Civilians bear the brunt of armed conflict. Women, children, refugees, displaced persons and other vulnerable groups are going through even worse tragedies. International humanitarian law has provisions on the protection of civilians and the Security Council has adopted many resolutions and presidential statements in recent years under the protection of civilians agenda. It has been five years since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel and facilities. However, to date the provisions contained in international humanitarian law and Council resolutions are yet to be effectively implemented. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has also posed further challenges to the protection of civilians. Reality shows that the international community still has a long way to go on the protection of civilians.

A recent example is the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which resulted in more than 200 civilian deaths, including women and children, the displacement of tens of thousands of people, and severe damage to schools and medical facilities. Even the one and only COVID-19 testing lab in the Gaza Strip was hit by airstrikes and rendered inoperable. In Afghanistan, as foreign troops have begun to withdraw, the security situation has deteriorated, and attacks continue. In the first quarter of this year, 573 civilians were killed and 1,210 injured, many of them women and children. The number of casualties increased by 29 per cent compared with the same period last year. This is a microcosm of the current state of the protection of civilians around the world. China is deeply concerned and urges all relevant parties to earnestly abide by international humanitarian law, implement the relevant Council resolutions, fully protect civilians and provide safe and unhindered access to humanitarian relief operations.

Numerous painful experiences have shown that in the face of violence and conflict, even the most vigorous measures are not enough to protect civilians and civilian facilities from harm. Only by preventing and resolving conflicts can we provide the best protection for civilians. The Council must fulfil its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and be committed to addressing the root causes and political resolution of conflicts so as to bring hope to civilians. To address the root causes of conflict, we must take integrated measures, fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

help countries in conflict to achieve poverty-reduction goals as soon as possible, strengthen education and health care, enhance people's well-being and consolidate the foundations for peace. To resolve conflicts politically, it is necessary to defuse hot-spot issues through dialogue, good offices and consultations. All parties to the conflict are urged to respond to the global ceasefire initiative, immediately cease hostilities and advance peace processes through political negotiations.

According to the Charter of the United Nations and the international law, the responsibility to protect civilians lies first and foremost with the Governments concerned. In implementing Security Council resolutions, full consideration should be given to the characteristics and specific circumstances of each conflict situation, and the sovereignty and legitimate concerns of the countries in question should be respected. The international community should provide humanitarian development and reconstruction assistance to the countries concerned and help these countries strengthen capacity-building. Humanitarian action should be carried out in line with the principles of impartiality neutrality, objectivity and independence, maintaining its humanitarian nature and avoiding politicization.

For many years, through South-South cooperation, the Belt and Road initiative and other channels, including the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund, China has funded many projects to help developing countries, including countries in conflict, strengthen infrastructure-building, improve people's livelihood and protect civilians. In response to the urgent humanitarian needs of some countries in conflict, China has extended a timely helping hand and provided large amounts of food, medical equipment and COVID-19 vaccines to countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, Syria and Somalia. Looking ahead, China will continue working with the international community to address the root causes of conflicts and help countries in conflict enhance their capacity for independent development and the protection of civilians.

Annex 5**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Gert Auväärt**

We thank the briefers for their presentations today. Our particular thanks go to Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his work on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for keeping this issue steadily in the Council's focus as a priority over the past years.

This is our second annual discussion on this topic during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has put a magnifying lens both on the suffering of civilians in conflict and on our shortcomings as States and the Security Council in ending and preventing them. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/423) testifies, conflicts are increasingly protection crises, with the most vulnerable and marginalized — including women, children, refugees and displaced persons — most at risk. COVID-19 has added to these risks while limiting the means to protect and assist them.

This includes the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, with allegations of mass killings, sexual and gender-based violence, destruction and looting, as well as abductions and forced displacement. It is demonstrated by the dangers faced by civilians in Afghanistan, which saw, inter alia, a 43-per cent increase in civilian deaths from non-suicide improvised explosive devices in 2020.

In Syria, millions of people have been deprived of their homes and livelihoods as a result of a decade-long conflict. Schools, hospitals and other protected objects have been indiscriminately and deliberately attacked, in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Cross-line humanitarian assistance remains dysfunctional, irregular and unreliable. This underscores the importance of a sustainable long-term cross-border humanitarian response to ensure that all Syrian people receive necessary food items, medicine and COVID-19 vaccines.

Attacks against civilians also include violence against medical care. Five years on from the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), medical personnel continue to be abducted, threatened and killed, facilities and transports destroyed. The wounded and sick are denied access to care. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has counted 3,780 attacks against health-care workers in an average of 33 countries per year between 2016 and 2020. This violence includes an attack on a maternity ward in Kabul, which resulted in the deaths of 23 civilians, including 19 women and 3 children.

Attacks on health care deny assistance to those most in need and can have long-term repercussions for States and communities. We appreciate the good practices and recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General, as well as the guidance of the ICRC on the protection of health care.

We are deeply concerned about attacks on and killing of journalists in situations of conflict and reiterate the need to ensure their safety. The safety of journalists is among the focus areas of the annual conference of the Media Freedom Coalition, organized this year by Estonia.

We fully stand by the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, as well as the implementation of the resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2565 (2021). We also underline the importance of following up on the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights to create a credible agenda for protection, making use of the tools the United Nations has across all of its three pillars.

Peacekeeping and special political missions continue to play a key role in the protection of civilians and, if they are to do so, their resources need to be sufficient. The risks to civilians need to inform the transitions of the United Nations presence so as to ensure that the United Nations protection capacity is sustained throughout these processes.

Estonia reiterates its call for compliance with international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We underline that existing international law also applies in cyberspace. This is of crucial importance as we have seen cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure, including health care.

We echo the Secretary-General's call to make accountability for the violations of international law — through national and international mechanisms, as well as services for victims and survivors — a priority. Among the steps taken at the domestic level, we welcome the continued contribution of the International Criminal Court in this regard.

Annex 6**Statement by the Minister Counsellor of France to the United Nations, Diarra Dime Labille**

[Original: French]

I thank China for organizing this debate and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Mr. Maurer for their briefings. I also thank Ms. Nemat.

I have three points to develop.

First, we have made the same observation for several years — civilian populations continue to pay the price of conflicts every day, especially in Syria, the Tigray region of Ethiopia, Burma and Yemen. We certainly welcome the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Gaza, but lasting arrangements must be put in place to ensure the sustainability of the ceasefire and protect civilians.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has aggravated ongoing conflicts, exacerbating inequalities and heightening risks to civilians, resulting in a critical increase in humanitarian needs. As the Secretary-General describes in his report (S/2021/423), forced displacement, famine and food insecurity, as well as medical and humanitarian shortages, have weighed on civilians in conflict areas. This is especially true for vulnerable or marginalized communities. The adverse consequences of climate change and environmental degradation also require an urgent collective response.

The past year has seen escalating violence against children and sexual and gender-based violence, as well as violations of international humanitarian law. Attacks on the press and journalists have remained high. We have a collective responsibility to meet these protection needs.

We continue to support the Secretary-General's call for a cessation of hostilities in order to facilitate the fight against the pandemic. Equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines is essential, especially as people affected by conflict risk being left behind. We reiterate the importance of safe and unhindered humanitarian access in order to facilitate vaccination campaigns, in accordance with resolution 2565 (2021).

The protection of civilians remains at the heart of peacekeeping operations, which must implement their mandate by taking into account the analysis of threats against civilians, including threats of sexual and gender-based violence and threats of serious violations against civilians. the children. It is essential that United Nations missions be provided with sufficient human resources and capacities to meet these specific needs.

Next, the Council must therefore remain mobilized to ensure that parties respect their obligations under international humanitarian law; that is a priority. The increase in attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel in the context of the pandemic, even as people need them more than ever, is particularly worrying. These attacks must not go unpunished. In addition, the call for humanitarian action, made by France and Germany in September 2019, highlights concrete commitments that States can make to better respect international humanitarian law. We encourage all Member States to endorse this call, which is now supported by 47 Member States and the European Union.

Finally, the contribution of the Council to the fight against impunity must be strengthened, so that the protection of civilians is more effective. The Council should call for cooperation with fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry and international criminal justice instruments, first and foremost the International Criminal Court, for the most serious crimes.

We also reiterate our call for better use of the sanctions tool for those responsible for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including violence against children and sexual violence.

Annex 7**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, Nagaraj Naidu Kakanur**

Let me begin by thanking you, Sir, and your delegation for organizing this open debate. We thank the briefers for their valuable inputs and perspectives.

It is indeed disconcerting that civilians continue to be the primary victims of armed conflict.

There can be no substitute for national efforts in creating an environment where civilians are secure. While peacekeepers implementing Security Council mandates and humanitarian organizations delivering much-needed aid have an important role to play, the onus of responsibility for protecting civilians lies fundamentally with national Governments.

We cannot ignore the adverse impacts of terror attacks in today's debate on the protection of civilians. Terrorists and terror entities have significantly enhanced their capabilities by gaining access to new and emerging technologies, which present us with new threats, including for civilian populations.

Over the last two decades, the protection of civilians agenda has significantly expanded, particularly as a result of changes in the conduct of hostilities and increase in intra-State conflict situations. The Security Council, during the same period, has also adopted many resolutions and presidential statements to strengthen the international community's resolve and focus on protection of civilians in armed conflict situations. However, given today's global state of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, it is obvious that the implementation of these instruments is not matching expectations.

In this regard, I would like to submit the following for the Council's consideration:

Respect for principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States, should remain the basis for all actions taken by the Council for the protection of civilians. A decision to intervene, if politically motivated, runs the risk of being counterproductive and therefore needs to be avoided. Furthermore, any intervention must be proportionate to the threat, involve the use of appropriate methods and be based on credible and verified threat perception.

The efforts of the Council and of the international community should be directed at assisting national authorities in developing capabilities and capacities to protect civilians.

Ensuring accountability for serious violations remains one of the challenges in strengthening the protection of civilians. The United Nations should support countries in conflict situations in enhancing their national accountability mechanisms to end impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law.

The Council's intervention should favour the provisions of Chapter VI of the Charter to those of Chapter VII. Use of force should indeed be the measure of last resort when all diplomatic and political efforts fail to protect civilians.

Peacekeeping is one of the key instruments available to the United Nations in discharging its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Today, the majority of the United Nations peacekeeping missions include the protection of civilians as one of their mandates. It is imperative that expectations from peacekeeping missions remain realistic and take into consideration the multiple resource constraints under which they function.

The actions of the Council and the international community should facilitate an engagement between warring factions in a conflict situation in a nationally owned and inclusive political process. This inclusive approach to national reconciliation, anchored in State sovereignty, is the only way to move forward and ensure the protection of civilians in an effective, pragmatic and enduring manner.

The Council must avoid the politicization of humanitarian work and humanitarian actors involved in conflict. The fundamental principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence should guide the work of humanitarian agencies and organizations.

To conclude, my delegation will continue to work closely with the international community in our concerted efforts to alleviate the sufferings of civilians in situations of armed conflict.

Annex 8**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, Geraldine Byrne Nason**

I thank China for organizing today's debate on this important topic. I also thank Mark Lowcock, Peter Maurer and Ms. Orzala Nemat for sharing their comprehensive and concerning briefings.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2021/423) sets out in stark terms the urgency of the need for the continued attention of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It describes a year of widespread use of force against civilians, as well as violations of international human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law.

A year where conflict, the coronavirus disease, environmental degradation and climate risks converged with devastating consequences is by any standard a bad year.

Regrettably, five years from the adoption of Resolution 2286 (2016), deplorable attacks on medical facilities and personnel continue. As we have heard, today these attacks have a devastating impact on local populations who are deprived access to fragile health systems in the midst of a global health pandemic. Persons with disabilities face even greater barriers in accessing medical care and protection in conflict. Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, who are overwhelmingly women and girls, are deprived of treatment and support just when it is most critically needed.

Already this year, attacks on health facilities in Aleppo, Gaza and Tigray have left the most vulnerable people without access to critical care. Grave violations against children continue to be committed with impunity, with thousands of children killed, maimed or forcibly recruited, including in Afghanistan, Somalia and Myanmar. We really must ensure compliance and respect for international humanitarian law and continue to strengthen accountability for all violations.

Ireland remains gravely concerned at the devastating impact on civilians of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The Secretary-General has consistently highlighted the fact that civilians account for almost 90 per cent of those killed and injured by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, exacting a horrific toll on vulnerable communities and persisting long after the conflict has ended. The manner in which explosive weapons are used in populated areas has severe short-term and long-term effects, including widespread loss of life, physical and psychological injuries, and long-lasting damage to critical civilian infrastructure.

Ireland shares the Secretary-General's view that we must do more to reverse this pattern. That is why Ireland is leading consultations in Geneva on a political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Despite the pandemic, good progress has been made and, with the support of the international community, we are determined to finalize a political declaration that will result in lasting change.

United Nations peacekeeping operations play a major role in the protection of civilians, including in the area of prevention. However, we also know that transitions from peacekeeping missions often occur when political stability is fragile or peace processes remain tenuous. As peacekeeping missions prepare to transition, the Council must ensure that the process places the needs of civilians at its core and that measures are in place to protect conflict-affected civilians from new or persistent risks of harm.

For most of us, the protection of civilians means, at its most basic, ensuring that the most vulnerable trapped in conflict are able to meet their fundamental needs, not least freedom from hunger.

Conflict is the number one driver of hunger worldwide. This is something we know all too well in the Council, where we are regularly briefed on the food crises directly flowing from conflict in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, north-eastern Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen. Too often, starvation is used as a weapon of war. By the end of last year, 99 million people — the majority of those 99 million people are women and girls — were suffering crisis levels of acute hunger due to conflict. Conflict leads directly to the destruction of crops and pastures and the defilement of wells and water sources. It results in displacement and the inability to maintain livelihoods. Indirectly, economic blockades, currency devaluations and unemployment exacerbate food insecurity.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2417 (2018) was a real testament to the Council's unity on the need to counter conflict-induced hunger. Resolution 2417 (2018) gives us the tools we need to tackle the issue of conflict and hunger. What we need now is the collective political will to use them. While rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access is vital during an acute food crisis, the Council must look at early action to prevent severe food insecurity and famine, especially to safeguard child and maternal health. We know that early warning and early action are effective in preventing the onset of hunger.

Finally, I want to address the dreadful protection crisis unfolding in Tigray, which is a matter of grave concern. Allegations of mass killings, horrific conflict-related sexual violence, destruction and looting, as well as abductions, forced displacement and forcible returns of refugees must be addressed by the Council.

As a direct result of the conflict, we now are hearing early warnings of famine in Tigray. And despite the large humanitarian operation in the region, the intentional denial of humanitarian access by all sides, the intentional protection violations by all sides and, worst of all, the intentional killing of medical and humanitarian staff are driving a catastrophic downward spiral that will lead to continued human suffering, malnutrition and, quite conceivably, starvation.

We have seen the white note prepared by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, in line with resolution 2417 (2018). We are carefully examining it, including given our role as co-focal point with the Niger on conflict and hunger.

The alarm bells are ringing. None of us here in this meeting can afford to ignore them.

Annex 9**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Alicia Buenrostro Massieu**

[Original: Spanish]

At the outset, we thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock; the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, and Ms. Orzala Nemat for their briefings. We have carefully reviewed the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which highlights worrying trends, which have been further exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

My statement will focus on four points.

The first concerns the increase in food insecurity in 2020. It is unacceptable that almost 100 million people living in conflict situations are suffering from high levels of food insecurity and that the trend is increasing, particularly in Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, the Sahel and the north-eastern area of Nigeria, which calls for the Council's immediate attention in coordination with the relevant specialized agencies.

In order to break the cycle created by conflict and food insecurity, we must prioritize hunger reduction, while devoting special attention to the most vulnerable populations and gender, as food insecurity disproportionately affects women and girls.

In places like the Central African Republic, Somalia and the Tigray region, we have seen direct attacks on food stocks and agriculture, which undeniably constitute crimes against humanity and which we categorically condemn as a tactic of war. In that regard, we recall that, in 2019, under the aegis of Mexico, amendments to the Rome Statute were adopted classifying the intentional use of starvation as a war crime in non-international armed conflicts.

The second point concerns persistent attacks in urban areas. As the Secretary-General's report highlights, 88 per cent of people killed and wounded by the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas were civilians in 2020. In addition, the increasing use of improvised explosive devices represents a constant challenge faced by the international community. Enforcement at the national level must be strengthened so as to prevent the materials used to make these devices from falling into the hands of members of armed groups.

Attacks in urban areas often affect infrastructure that is essential to the civilian population, such as hospitals, schools and water plants, among others. We reaffirm our support for resolution 2573 (2021), which was recently adopted unanimously by the Council. As it is aware of the importance of protecting essential infrastructure, my country, Mexico, recently endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, and we invite other States to do so as well. Attacks on schools and the military use of such facilities disrupt children's access to education and expose them to even greater risks, such as their recruitment by armed groups.

The third point involves acknowledging the crucial work carried out by medical personnel in providing assistance to the civilian population. Despite the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), attacks on medical personnel have continued. From 2016 to 2020, the ICRC documented 3,780 incidents that affected health-care services in addition to the recent attacks in Gaza that led to the loss of the lives of health personnel and the intentional attacks on civilians in Afghanistan, including against a hospital's maternity ward in Kabul in May 2020. We stress that health-care personnel and facilities are not military targets.

Furthermore, counter-terrorism measures also have unintended consequences for medical personnel. Humanitarian personnel have even been criminally prosecuted for their assistance work in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Humanitarian personnel, in general, and medical personnel, in particular, must always be protected, not persecuted.

My last point concerns the additional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In accordance with resolution 2565 (2021) and General Assembly resolution 74/274, ensuring fair access to and the equitable allocation of COVID-19 vaccines is critical for the more than 160 million people living in conflict situations. Inequality in that area affects Africa, which has only received 2 per cent of all vaccine doses administered globally. Prioritizing that concern is in everyone's interest. As has already been said, none of us will be safe until everyone is safe.

Accordingly, I reaffirm Mexico's support for upholding the ceasefire called for by the Secretary-General so that we can confront the pandemic.

The principle of alleviating the suffering of the civilian population in armed conflict is extremely clear. It requires strengthening compliance with obligations under international humanitarian law and adopting measures that ensure accountability in cases of non-compliance, while always prioritizing people's safety.

Annex 10**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, Mona Juul**

We thank the presidency for organizing this open debate and are grateful for the briefings given by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, and the Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Orzala Nemat. We are appalled by the increase in attacks deliberately targeting civilians in Afghanistan that she mentioned.

We are struck by the levels of civilian death, injury, psychological trauma and destruction of infrastructure reported by the Secretary-General (S/2021/423). This is particularly alarming, as we know that the extent to which civilians are protected during a conflict can determine the ultimate prospects for achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation.

Norway therefore urges all parties to armed conflicts to comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. Alleged violations of international humanitarian law must be thoroughly, impartially and effectively investigated. And accountability for violations must be ensured through credible national or international criminal justice mechanisms.

We are deeply concerned about the consequences of persistent and increasing levels of violence, threats and attacks against medical care, thereby amplifying the devastating effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Attacks against medical and health-care facilities and medical personnel and transports, including through cybermeans, are always unacceptable, and prohibited under international humanitarian law.

We call for the full implementation of resolutions 2286 (2016) and 2565 (2021). And we support the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal. We will continue to encourage all parties to adhere to it and call for direct support to make such ceasefires more robust and durable.

In conflict, children have to carry the heaviest burden on their shoulders. They must be better protected. We are appalled by attacks on education facilities and remain concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled absenteeism and school closures, exposing children to the risk of a wide range of threats, including child marriage, child labour, sexual and gender-based violence and their recruitment and use by armed forces and groups. The right to education must be upheld. Education protects children. And we call on all States to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration. We applaud the 108 States that have already done so, including 10 members of the Council.

The widespread and increasing level of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict settings — now intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic — is also of a grave concern. The Council must use all means at its disposal to prevent and protect against sexual and gender-based violence and other gender-related threats. Perpetrators must be brought to justice. And there must be an end to the widespread use of sexual violence as a tool of political repression and tactic of war and terror.

On top of the pandemic, the threat of famine, conflict, environmental degradation and climate risks converged in 2020. More people were forcibly displaced by mid-year than in the entire year before. This considerable increase is a harsh reminder that we must shift the Council's focus from recognition to action. Additionally, the cycle between conflict and food insecurity can only be broken through an integrated response. We call on all parties to spare no effort in providing the infrastructure needed for food production and distribution. The intentional use

of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is a war crime. And we urge States parties to the Rome Statute to ratify or accept the recent amendment concerning the war crime of starvation in non-international armed conflict.

Efforts must continue to strengthen the capacity of United Nations peace operations to protect civilians, including by prioritizing support for political dialogue as a means of establishing a protective environment. Missions must receive adequate resources, and engage all components to deliver on protection mandates, including to combat sexual and gender-based violence, and ensure child protection. The report of the Secretary-General also shows the impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, particularly those with wide-area effects wherein 88 per cent of the casualties are civilian.

We support the Irish-led initiative for a political declaration to minimize the use of such weapons.

There is no doubt that the prevention of conflict is key. And the primary responsibility lies with Member States.

Annex 11**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Gennady Kuzmin**

[Original: Russian]

We thank the Chinese delegation for taking the initiative to address the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and Ms. Nemat for their valuable contribution to this discussion.

The depressing situation concerning the protection of the civilian population during armed conflict demonstrates that this issue must remain a priority on the Security Council's agenda. Although a toolkit of international legal instruments designed to ensure upholding international humanitarian law exists, civilian populations continue to fall victim to armed conflict.

Russia strongly condemns the practice of intentional attacks on civilians, as well as casualties resulting from the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in violation of the provisions of international humanitarian law.

We welcome the useful initiatives aimed at minimizing the suffering of the civilian population. The adoption of resolution 2573 (2021) in April, initiated by Viet Nam, which reiterated the need "for the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population" was an example of a balanced and extremely needed measure in the area.

At the same time, we call for circumspection with regard to formulating new international legal concepts that are supposedly meant to bridge the gaps in the protection regime established by the Geneva Conventions. In addition, the advantage of establishing further categories of individuals requiring special protection does not appear self-evident. In practice, such an approach leads to the opposite results intended. It differentiates the legal regime and loosens protection that civilians could receive.

The Security Council has been mandated with the task of the utmost importance — the maintenance of international peace and security. Prevention and the peaceful settlement of armed conflicts can genuinely guarantee that people's lives are protected.

We are very concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423), the country is encountering its highest toll among civilians. The recent escalation concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is also very worrisome. Missile attacks from Gaza and strikes by the Israeli air force against densely populated areas resulted in numerous casualties and destroyed buildings and civil infrastructure. The number of conflicts in Africa is also on the rise. Civilians continue to die from shelling in eastern Ukraine where the Kyiv authorities have waged an undeclared war on their own population for several years.

Russia strongly advocates that all those responsible for crimes against civilians in armed conflict must be held accountable. However, that must happen in full compliance with the norms of law and never as an instrument of political manipulation. The major role must be played by national legal systems.

Terrorist groups taking part in armed conflicts pose a particular threat to civilians today. As we see from the cases of Syria and Iraq, such groups carry out mass executions, use civil facilities as shelters and civilians as human shields, and set up obstacles for humanitarian deliveries. We stand for strengthening international cooperation in countering terrorism under the auspices of the United Nations.

The humanitarian component is an important factor in the protection of civilians. The unprecedented politicizing of humanitarian activity that we are witnessing today runs counter to the principle of preventing and minimizing the suffering of civilian populations. It is imperative for humanitarian organizations to follow scrupulously the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance articulated in the relevant General Assembly resolutions. We strongly condemn the practice of using humanitarian pretexts in order to render assistance to terrorists and spread disinformation.

In conclusion, I would like to make the following point. Against the backdrop of eloquent rhetoric promoting the protection of civilians, the practice of introducing unilateral measures through the pressure of illegal sanctions by some States is particularly hypocritical. Attempts to economically suffocate disloyal Governments in reality translates into inflicting direct and irreparable damage on their civilians. In that regard, we recall the Secretary-General's call to waive sanctions that limit the delivery of basic necessities, food, medicines and equipment and for the restoration of critical infrastructure for civilians in conflict situations.

Annex 12**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Inga Rhonda King**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Kenya, the Niger and Tunisia — as well as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (A3+1). We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, Mr. Maurer and Ms. Nemat for their valuable briefings.

The A3+1 reaffirms its steadfast commitment to addressing the most urgent and enduring protection challenges created by the intersections of protracted conflict, climate-related security risks, historically produced socioeconomic instability, the global health crisis and related humanitarian impacts.

In the past few months, the Security Council has narrowed its focus on the protection of infrastructure indispensable to the survival of civilian populations and conflict and food security. Today, we take this opportunity to address further protection concerns in relation to the global health and economic crises, conflict prevention and resolution and compliance with international law by making five key points.

First, the A3+1 condemns, in the strongest terms, all acts of violence against civilians. The use of explosive weapons, the continued threat of explosive remnants of war and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons place millions of civilians at risk of displacement, injury and death. Women, children and persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected.

We express our deep alarm at the loss of civilian lives and the high number of casualties resulting from the recent escalation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East-Jerusalem, and the hostilities related to the Gaza strip. We welcome the ceasefire reached and call on the parties to uphold the agreement and to act seriously to implement it. We also stress the need for the immediate provision of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in Gaza, and call for the expeditious and unimpeded delivery of such humanitarian assistance.

Our next point relates to accountability. Impunity for actors who violate international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as all relevant legal frameworks on the protection of civilians, cannot be tolerated.

Likewise, there must be accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse committed under the United Nations flag. One egregious example is the insufficient redress for survivors and victims of sexual violence in Haiti. We call for swift and appropriate survivor-centred actions to not only end impunity but also to meet the ongoing psychosocial needs of survivors and victims. We further welcome the positive steps taken by the Secretary-General, including troop- and police-contributing countries, to prevent, respond and take remedial action against sexual exploitation and abuse.

The A3+1 reiterates its concerns about the living conditions of migrants and refugees, notably those intercepted at sea and disembarked on Libyan soil, where migrant women, in overcrowded detention centres, face violations of all kinds, including sexual violence. In view of that situation, it is necessary to review the policy of disembarking migrants and refugees intercepted at sea on Libyan soil where, moreover, the presence of foreign fighters and mercenaries continue to jeopardize stabilization efforts.

Turning to the global health crisis, the pandemic has both heightened the exposure of women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence and reduced their

access to justice, reparations and critical health care and other psychosocial services. Overall, the coronavirus disease has emphasized the long-term consequences for civilians of attacks on health, educational and other critical civilian infrastructure, including water and sanitation services.

We must redouble our efforts to prevent and redress attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical and humanitarian personnel and medical transport and equipment, as well as attacks against hospitals and other medical facilities, in line with resolution 2286 (2016).

Further, the A3+1 underscores the need for the accelerated implementation of resolution 2565 (2021). That requires increased support from the international community to regional institutions and Governments to ensure inclusive national vaccination that targets all civilians, including refugees, displaced persons, persons with disabilities, detained persons, migrants and persons living in areas controlled by non-State armed groups. There is also an urgent need to expand production capacities in developing countries, including across the African continent, and in support of equitable vaccine access.

Our fifth point is that durable peace and the long-term protection of civilians require ongoing attention to the root causes of conflict. Continued and enhanced cooperation and coordination among key stakeholders within the multilateral system, regional institutions, national Governments, communities and civil society are critical.

Regionally derived and nationally owned pathways to security and development that embed climate-, gender- and age-responsive approaches, such as the African Union's Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020 initiative and its Agenda 2063, must receive the full support of the international community. That is the surest way to guarantee enhanced and sustainable lives and livelihoods for civilians in conflict and post-conflict contexts in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Access to quality education for all children, especially in conflict-affected areas, remains critical. As such, the A3+1 condemn all attacks against schools and related personnel.

Before concluding, we wish to add that the application of protection of civilians policies and operational guidelines by international, regional and national security forces is critical.

In that regard, we commend the continued implementation of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) Joint Force compliance framework to prevent civilians from harm during counter-terrorism and other military operations. That framework is important in promoting national ownership and enhancing the capacities of the G-5 Sahel countries, to that effect.

Efforts to enhance compliance within peacekeeping operations and national security forces must occur alongside the use of force to secure peace. Developing conflict early warning systems through community alert networks and public information and reporting systems will help peacekeeping operations gather and analyse information on threats to civilians in a timely manner.

Peacekeeping operations and special political missions in collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission must continue to work with Governments to strengthen State institutions. That includes support for national capacity development to protect civilians during mission transition.

Finally, there is a need to bolster unarmed approaches to the protection of civilians, drawing on the success stories registered in regions of countries such as

the Central African Republic, Mali and South Sudan. A combination of local and national ownership, as well as United Nations mission support for local conflict resolution mechanisms, mediation and locally derived pacific solutions to conflict, are far more likely to register long-term success.

Annex 13**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations**

I would like to start by thanking our briefers.

I wish to make three points today on this important agenda.

First, there is an urgent need to address the impacts of conflict on access to health care, particularly in the light of the current pandemic. Five years after the Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016), attacks on medical or humanitarian personnel are still being used as a method of warfare in defiance of international humanitarian law. Civilians continue to suffer from the secondary impacts of conflict on access to health care.

In that regard, we are deeply concerned about the impact of the recent violence on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including on health facilities and access to health care. Humanitarian workers should be able to operate safely in Gaza with access to vital medical supplies and equipment.

The United Kingdom strongly condemns the recent brutal killing of Dr. Louis Edward Saleh Ufew, a South Sudanese aid worker in Unity state in South Sudan, as well as the targeting of a clearly marked humanitarian convoy nearby, including an ambulance. Those are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and Council resolutions such as 2286 (2016).

In Syria, hospitals continue to be attacked. In March, an attack on Al-Atarib hospital killed seven patients just weeks after the United Nations had passed on its location coordinates. The United Kingdom condemns all such attacks unequivocally and we look forward to the findings of the Senior Advisory Panel on humanitarian deconfliction in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Secondly, we cannot discuss protection of civilians without mentioning the current situation in Tigray. The United Kingdom's Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Nick Dyer, visited Tigray last week. He found a growing risk of famine conditions emerging in part due to the conduct of hostilities. Reports of atrocities continue to emerge, including mass killings, endemic sexual violence and the systematic destruction of basic services, including hospitals.

Armed parties continue to routinely prevent the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Aid that is delivered is often being taken from those in need to feed soldiers. Agricultural production is being targeted. Imports of vital communications equipment are being delayed. This is not a matter of interfering in sovereign internal affairs but observing the binding obligations of all States under international humanitarian law.

Tigray is not, of course, the only context in which conflict is leading to risk of famine. Millions of people in Yemen, north-eastern Nigeria and parts of South Sudan face the same risk. The Council, through resolution 2417 (2018), should receive swift reporting when the risk of conflict-induced famine occurs so that it can take action.

This brings me to my third point on actions and reporting. The Council has adopted resolutions calling for accountability for those who target health care, humanitarian workers and critical infrastructure, most recently under Viet Nam's presidency. Such incidents should be brought systematically to our attention, with a greater emphasis on identifying the violators and how they are operating.

But we must then act on that reporting. The Council should use the tools at its disposal to ensure those responsible for such attacks are held to account, including through strengthening our use of sanctions. We cannot shirk that vital responsibility.

Annex 14**Statement by the Acting Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs of the United States of America to the United Nations, Jeffrey DeLaurentis**

I would like to thank our briefers for their insights on the impact of armed conflict on civilian populations.

The past year has been remarkably challenging, especially for those who have endured the pandemic while simultaneously trying to survive in conflict situations. That makes it all the more important to respect and protect the civilians living in those circumstances. We must uphold our collective demand in resolution 2565 (2021) that all parties to armed conflicts facilitate the equitable, safe, and unhindered delivery and distribution of coronavirus disease vaccines in areas of armed conflict.

The Security Council and the international community have made concerted efforts in the past two decades on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, yet there is much work to be done. The United States strongly believes that full respect for international humanitarian law by all parties to armed conflict is essential for the protection of civilians.

In Syria, the Al-Assad regime has, for years, launched attacks that have killed innumerable civilians, including women, children, and life-saving humanitarian personnel, as well as destroying civilian and medical infrastructure. Those attacks highlight the need to distinguish between civilian populations and combatants in military objectives.

In Ethiopia, we continue to receive horrific reports of ongoing human rights abuses against civilians, including extrajudicial killings, forced removals, and widespread sexual violence, including the gang rape of women and girls. We condemn those acts in the strongest of terms. The violence must cease, the immediate protection of civilians and humanitarian access must be instituted, and those responsible must be held accountable. We urge the international community to take action — as the United States has done — to press for an end to the violence and for accountability for abuses and violations.

In Afghanistan, we have seen continued violence that has not only affected civilians but has explicitly targeted them. As we have said before, here and elsewhere, those appalling attacks on journalists, human rights defenders, health workers, civil servants and children are not only unacceptable, but undermine progress toward a sustainable peace. All parties — not just those in formal positions of power — must respect their obligations under international law, including those related to the protection of civilians. The Taliban, which is largely responsible for the continued violence in Afghanistan, must immediately stop its undeclared spring offensive, refrain from attacks against civilians and cease its attacks in the vicinity of hospitals, schools, universities, mosques and other civilian areas.

Finally, regarding the current situation in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, President Biden made it clear last week that Palestinians and Israelis, like individuals everywhere, have the right to life, liberty and security of person. That is not an Israeli privilege or a Palestinian privilege. It is a human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The United States also sees preventing violence as an essential part of protecting civilians. To that end, the White House continues to coordinate a whole-of-Government approach to forecast, prevent and respond to atrocities through its atrocity early warning task force.

Given the disproportionate impact of conflict and violence on women and girls, as well as the importance of women's participation in efforts to prevent conflict and promote civilian protection and peacebuilding, the Biden-Harris Administration is committed to advancing the women and peace and security agenda. We urge the international community to include protection and response to gender-based violence as a proportionate amount of humanitarian assistance. Access to emergency medical responses for rape victims must be a standard component of any conflict response effort. It is the minimum we can provide to the women and girls we have failed to protect.

United Nations peacekeeping is one of the most effective tools the Security Council has for protecting civilians in conflict areas. We will continue to work to ensure that the protection of civilians and the promotion of human rights lie at the core of what United Nations peacekeeping missions do. That means making sure that those missions have the political support, the resources and the tools they need to prevent violence, respond rapidly to attacks against civilians and engage with communities to understand what they need to be safe.

The United States has been sharing and building upon good practices related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including bilaterally and during coalition operations. We encourage others to do the same.

Annex 15**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Hai Anh Pham**

I thank all three briefers for their insights.

Over the past year, civilians continued to account for the vast majority of deaths and injuries in armed conflicts, including many innocent civilians during the past few weeks in the Israel-Palestine conflict, a large number of whom were children.

Millions of internally displaced persons worldwide face the dire situation of compromised access to essential services, such as water and medical care; increased threats of conflict-induced famine; diseases; and exposure to sexual and gender-based violence.

Against that backdrop, I have three key messages.

First, it is crucial to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. All parties to armed conflicts must fully respect the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality and refrain from attacking, destroying or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

Disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects must be strongly condemned. Violations must be addressed appropriately at national and international levels in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and applicable laws.

It is imperative that all civilians have access to assistance. We call on all parties to ensure unhindered access to life-saving humanitarian assistance and facilitate the activities of impartial humanitarian agencies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is there to help alleviate civilian suffering and save lives.

The primary responsibility to protect civilians rests with the State. We welcome measures to integrate international humanitarian law obligations in domestic laws, policies and operational frameworks and the sharing of national best practices in that regard.

Secondly, reported attacks against health-care facilities and medical personnel are extremely concerning. Such attacks are not only illegal, but they impair the fragile capacity of affected countries to save lives, especially during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The fifth anniversary of the landmark resolution 2286 (2016) is an opportunity to renew commitments to the protection of health-care facilities and medical personnel and to transform political will into concrete actions.

We reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian assistance and the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. All parties should join forces to fight that common enemy. We must spare no effort to plan and implement concrete and meaningful steps towards peace and recovery.

Thirdly, as important as humanitarian assistance is, it cannot replace a comprehensive approach to building national capacity, improving livelihoods and enhancing local people's resilience to challenges such as climate change, natural disasters and economic shocks.

We continue to stress the paramount importance of conflict prevention and peace-building. Addressing the root causes of conflicts, including inequality, inequities, injustices, lack of development and violations of the Charter of the United

Nations and international law, is the best way to prevent conflicts from happening and recurring.

Regional organizations should continue to play a leading role in promoting preventive diplomacy and confidence-building measures.

Under Viet Nam's presidency last month, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2573 (2021). Resolution 2573 (2021) urges all parties to armed conflict, inter alia, to protect civilian infrastructure that is critical to the delivery of humanitarian aid, including for the provision of essential services concerning vaccinations and related medical care and other essential services to the civilian population in armed conflict.

Also last month, in a presidential statement (S/PRST/2021/8), the Council expressed its serious concern about the threats posed to civilians by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices in affected countries.

In conclusion, the Council's unity and solidarity in this field reflects its strong commitment to upholding international humanitarian law. Let us join hands to ensure that our commitments and the international humanitarian law frameworks become a reality for the people on the ground.

Annex 16**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Adela Raz**

Let me start by thanking Ambassador Zhang and his team at the Permanent Mission of China for organizing today's meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Let me also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer. I also wish to pay special tribute to my sister Ms. Orzala Nemat and her groundbreaking work as Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

Protection of Civilians Week is always a very solemn time for Afghanistan at the United Nations. It is a week in which we draw attention to and remember everyone we lost during the four decades of conflict that our country has endured. The pain and suffering associated with war, its severe socioeconomic effects, its trauma and psychological impacts and the long-lasting effects it has on development underscore the need to mitigate the effects of conflict on civilians and ultimately achieve a peace that finally brings an end to all hostilities in Afghanistan.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has caused an additional strain on an already traumatized population. People who were already afraid of the senseless violence caused by the Taliban, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province and other terrorist groups operating under the Taliban's protective umbrella are now further troubled by the effects of a virus that has affected not only Afghanistan but the world as a whole. While further international efforts and a drastic increase in solidarity are needed in response, we are encouraged by the support extended by many partners to help mitigate the effects of the pandemic in conflict-affected countries.

The Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, for example, has been promoted by Member States all around the world, including Afghanistan. That appeal strengthened the Government of Afghanistan's previous call on the Taliban to engage in a ceasefire to provide the necessary space for peace efforts and humanitarian assistance to civilians in need. Unfortunately, however, the Taliban have refused to engage, and we continue to see a disastrous level of suffering and lack of humanitarian access throughout our country.

The Government of Afghanistan remains firmly committed to ensuring that civilians are protected in all operations conducted by the Government and our international partners. Our armed forces meticulously implement our national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation, which includes thorough guidelines on conducting operations with the protection of civilians at its centre. However, despite our best efforts, the enemies of Afghanistan continue to attack civilians directly while further placing many of them in harm's way by using them as human shields and launching their operations using civilian infrastructure.

The brutality of that continued campaign of violence has translated into horrific losses. During the first quarter of 2021, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reported 1,783 civilian casualties — a 29 per cent increase compared to that same period last year. We have also experienced a 37 per cent increase in the number of women killed and injured by attacks and a 23 per cent increase in child casualties. Afghanistan has, moreover, seen an increase in targeted attacks aimed at silencing essential stakeholders for peace, including civil servants, human rights defenders, women, activists, religious scholars and journalists. The perpetrators must stop such cowardly attacks of terror to show their legitimate commitment to peace.

The brutality of those groups has also been demonstrated through their continued attacks on schools and other spaces used by our children. The explosion outside the Sayed Ul-Shuhada high school in Kabul shook the entire country and indeed, the world. We continue to mourn the loss of the precious lives of the children who represent the future of our country. As a signatory of the Safe Schools Declaration, Afghanistan reiterates its absolute condemnation of all attacks that target the infrastructure needed for the growth and development of the leaders of a new Afghanistan. The commitment to a child's right to a safe and secure education is an obligation that all should share.

Continued attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel in Afghanistan and other relevant infrastructure such as power pylons, cell towers, energy stations and roadway infrastructure have made it more difficult to serve our people, who continue to suffer from the effects of conflict and the deadly virus. In addition, in recent months there have been direct attacks on those workers, as well as kidnappings and other acts of extortion. Meanwhile, the number of Afghans in need of humanitarian assistance doubled from 9.4 million in January 2020 to 18.4 million in January 2021. The levels of food insecurity also rose to affect 14 million people.

As provisioned by resolution 2286 (2016) and as outlined previously, the Government of Afghanistan has focused its efforts to ensure the safety of medical personnel. With the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines from the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility and other donors, we once again stress the importance of a cessation of hostilities to allow for the effective vaccination of the Afghan population. A failure to work together on that and a continuation of the fighting will only benefit the virus.

Before I conclude, allow me to re-emphasize the following key points to contribute to this worthwhile debate.

First, conflicts are the leading cause of civilian casualties and other societal disasters. Our emphasis must therefore be on preventing conflicts before they occur. The international community should work to address the root causes of conflict and improve preventative diplomacy.

Secondly, if a conflict breaks out, conflict resolution should be our priority. In that regard, I would like to underscore the critical role played by the United Nations and the Security Council specifically in promoting international peace and security and, in so doing, the protection of civilians, in particular through the strict implementation of resolutions and sanctions regimes to support our collective efforts.

Thirdly, the protection of civilians in armed conflict is an obligation and a shared responsibility of all parties to conflict. In Afghanistan, the Government is committed to the protection of civilians and is bound to it. However, the Taliban also needs to comply with international humanitarian law obligations and avoid targeting civilians and attacking public institutions and infrastructure. In this regard, I would like to stress that while we are pursuing the peace talks with the Taliban, it is essential that all international and regional partners increase their pressure on the Taliban to put an end to the ongoing violence, engage in peace talks in good faith, and enter an immediate and durable ceasefire to help us address the effects of COVID-19 and achieve a peace that will allow our people to prosper in a stable Afghanistan.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating Afghanistan's commitment to protecting civilians in line with our national and international obligations. We remain firm in our belief that peace is the only effective way to ensure the protection of our civilians and will redouble our efforts to achieve our long-awaited goal. Finally, let me reiterate our appreciation to the United Nations and our international partners for their support to peace — the most vital shared objective of all Afghan people.

Annex 17**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations, Sofiane Mimouni**

I would like to thank China for organizing this meeting and for its leadership as the President of the Security Council for the month of May. I would also like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their inspiring briefings on the necessity and importance of the Security Council's agenda on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, contained in document S/2021/423. The report highlights the fact that over the past years, civilians have continued to bear the brunt of armed conflicts, with attacks against civilians and casualties reported across several armed conflicts. The urbanization of conflicts, damage to and destruction of civilian infrastructure and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas have been of particular concern. Conflicts have also caused acute hunger, environmental deterioration and large-scale displacement, and exacerbated vulnerabilities in different contexts.

My delegation welcomes the special focus on the protection of health-care personnel and services in armed conflicts, considering that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has deepened the need for a renewed commitment to the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflicts. In fact, five years after the adoption of that resolution, multiple challenges and difficulties have emerged and violence, threats and attacks against medical care, in violation of international humanitarian law, still persist.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, already weak health-care systems have been overwhelmed in armed conflict and health-care services have been undermined at a time when they are most needed. Among all measures and good practices to protect medical care in armed conflict, the urgent need to ensure the equitable, safe and unhindered delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations in areas of armed conflict is widely recognized.

In this regard, Algeria reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, as well as the United Nations efforts towards conflict prevention and resolution in all corners of the world, in order to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations and deliver the necessary support to people in conflicts areas.

When we look at ongoing conflict situations, we cannot help being taken aback by the number of civilian casualties and the challenges that civilian populations are facing around the globe. The displacement of civilians and refugees, serious human rights abuses, the use of violence and starvation of populations as a weapon of war, the recruitment of child soldiers, the proliferation of small arms, cross-border movements, the difficulty of delivering emergency humanitarian aid and attacks against humanitarian personnel are still characteristics of the many conflicts that are shaking the planet.

We recognize the critical role played by the Security Council with regard to the protection of civilians, in particular since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which placed the issue of protecting civilians at the top of the priorities of the Security Council and as one of the fundamental pillars of peacekeeping mandates.

However, my delegation believes that further actions are needed to translate the conceptual development into concrete measures to protect civilians on the ground, through the following guiding measures.

We must prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflict. In this regard, we need a broad prevention strategy focused on tackling the root causes of conflicts and encompassing areas such as promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty and fostering good governance and a culture of peace, tolerance and the rule of law.

We need to strengthen the protection of civilians, based on the principles of universality and non-selectivity. The tools required to achieve this aim already exist and are available, but we still lack a comprehensive, coherent and specific approach to the issue of the protection of civilians, particularly where conflicts arising from foreign occupation are concerned. To that end, the implementation of international humanitarian law remains an obligation that the international community, through the Security Council, must impose when an occupying or administrative Power does not respect it.

We must ensure respect for international law in all circumstances. We must address the issue of accountability with regard to impunity for violations of international humanitarian law. In this context, the Security Council should consider the systematic inclusion in all peacekeeping mandates of an obligation to report violations of human or humanitarian rights.

We need to ensure more effective coordination among the United Nations mandated organs — the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — in responding to the needs of civilians in armed conflicts. The Peacebuilding Commission could also provide an appropriate framework for such coordination in post-conflict situations.

Finally, urge the Security Council and the Secretariat to strengthen their cooperation, common approach and interaction with regional organizations such as the African Union, which has made tremendous progress in that regard.

In conclusion, we recognize that protecting civilians is a complex task, requiring collaboration across the political, development and humanitarian spheres. It demands the involvement of all actors and collaboration at the local, national and global levels. In the long term, the best way to protect civilians is to build sustainable peace and for the Security Council to systematically reiterate its demand that all parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international law.

Annex 18**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations, María del Carmen Squeff**

[Original: Spanish]

Since the inclusion of the protection of civilians in armed conflict as a topic on the Security Council's agenda in 1999, this has been one of the thematic priorities of the Council. It is essential that the Security Council remain committed to this matter by promoting full respect for international law, in particular international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, as well as the fight against impunity. In this sense, we appreciate the convening of specific meetings such as this open debate.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423) and we value his recommendations and conclusions. Once again, we must deplore the fact that, according to that report, civilians continue to constitute the majority of the victims in conflicts. And among civilians, tens of thousands of children continue to be killed, maimed, subjected to sexual violence, abducted, recruited and used to participate in hostilities.

In this context, it is imperative to recall the obligations arising from the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, their additional protocols of 1977 and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, as well as customary international law.

Likewise, it is necessary to continue including and reinforcing activities for the protection of civilians in the mandates of the United Nations missions in the field. In this sense, we understand that the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations must be an integrated effort of the entire mission, which requires as a first essential measure close cooperation among the military, police and civilian components, in coordination with local Governments and communities and humanitarian organizations on the ground. The use of force to respond to threats of physical violence against civilians must be authorized in accordance with the applicable legal obligations, with the mandate established by the Security Council and with the specific rules of engagement and intervention of each mission.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, parties to conflict must make every effort to ensure effective and timely access to humanitarian action, including shipments and materials. Such assistance enjoys special protection under international humanitarian law, which is why it is worrying that access to humanitarian assistance may be hindered or even denied in many situations.

We regret that, five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), personnel, transportation and medical facilities continue to be the target of attacks in armed conflicts. According to the Secretary-General's report, in 2020 182 health-care workers died, 86 were kidnapped and 165 were injured in 22 conflicts surveyed.

We call on all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international law — including international human rights law, as appropriate, and international humanitarian law — in order to ensure respect and protection for all medical personnel and humanitarian personnel dedicated exclusively to medical missions, their means of transport and equipment, hospitals and other medical establishments.

In 2020, the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had a devastating impact on countries affected by armed conflict. This situation led the Council to adopt resolution 2565 (2021), which requires all parties to the conflict to immediately implement a sustained and durable humanitarian pause to facilitate the

equitable and safe distribution of vaccines against COVID-19 in conflict-affected areas. In this context, the protection of medical personnel and infrastructure is essential to ensuring the large-scale distribution of vaccines.

Another important element in the protection of civilians is the investigation of the facts and the rendering of accounts by those responsible for crimes against civilians. In this regard, on the one hand, Argentina considers it appropriate to reiterate that, in addition to any ad hoc investigation commission that may be established, there is another option for launching an investigation into events that could be serious violations of the Geneva Conventions by an impartial entity — the international humanitarian fact-finding commission provided for in Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

On the other hand, Argentina wishes to highlight the role of the International Criminal Court. In particular, we recall that according to its statute, the Court has jurisdiction over attacks against medical personnel, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are grouped, and against buildings, material, units and medical means of transport.

The suffering of victims is exacerbated when conflict and a global pandemic overlap. The proper application of international humanitarian law and international human rights law helps prevent and alleviate human suffering, including from COVID-19. The existing regulatory framework for the protection of civilians must be translated into concrete results on the ground. The Council should reinforce its efforts to explore how best to make this happen.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations**

Austria would like to thank China for convening this open video-teleconference on the protection of civilians and fully aligns itself with the statements by the European Union (annex 31) and the Group of Friends for the Protection of Civilians (annex 54). In our national capacity, we would like to highlight a few of our national priorities.

Once again, the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/423) underlines the necessity for the international community to take determined action on explosive weapons in populated areas. Bearing in mind the basic rules of distinction, necessity and proportionality in international humanitarian law, it is unacceptable that 88 per cent of those killed and injured by explosive weapons use in urban areas have been civilians. With more than 50 million people affected by urban conflict, including most recent armed conflicts, the protection of civilians from explosive weapons is a matter of urgency. We thank Ireland for spearheading the process on the political declaration on use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We look forward to an early adoption of the declaration and its subsequent implementation in order to effectively enhance the protection of civilians in urban warfare.

Five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), the relationship between the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and medical care deserves more attention. Beyond its direct effects, it is also the reverberating or long-term effects of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas on civilian facilities and infrastructure that impede medical care. Ensuring a minimum of medical care becomes all the more challenging when streets are blocked by rubble or electricity and water supplies break down. Evidence of psychological traumas related to explosive weapons use documents the severe impact on mental health of civilians. Some civilians, particularly children, struggle with post-traumatic impediments for a lifetime. To shed more light on this important topic, Austria, together with other Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society, has been organizing side events in various forums, as well as a large conference in 2019. We continue our engagement with a side event as part of this year's Protection of Civilians Week.

Twenty-two years after the introduction of the issue of the protection of civilians to the Council's agenda, we are far from meeting the various challenges associated with protecting civilians in armed conflict. Women and girls still have to endure horrendous acts of sexual and gender-based violence and remain particularly vulnerable in various conflict settings, exacerbated by the coronavirus disease pandemic. The relationship between armed conflict, environmental degradation and civilian displacement is becoming clearer by the month, while alarming levels of food insecurity compound civilian suffering. In this regard, while it is positive that the early-warning mechanism established under resolution 2417 (2018) has succeeded in giving early notice of approaching food insecurity crises, the international community needs to do more to prevent these crises from materializing.

While continuing to advocate for their protection in armed conflict, Austria continues to salute the invaluable contributions by civilians towards peace building and humanitarian relief efforts. In this regard, we condemn the numerous acts of violence and intimidation against women and youth peacebuilders, human rights defenders and humanitarian first responders in armed conflicts.

We remain on record with our calls on the Security Council to link the protection of civilians agenda closely with its work around women, peace and security, as well as youth, peace and security. We encourage the Security Council to

take the needs of persons with disabilities into account throughout its entire agenda and to continue with the full implementation of resolution 2475 (2019).

We cannot lose sight of the particular situation of minorities and their needs for protection and assistance. Unfortunately, we have witnessed throughout history that discrimination and prejudice against minorities lie at the root of many conflicts around the world. In Austria's view, it is essential that the protection of the rights of minorities be adequately incorporated in the United Nations overall agenda for the prevention of conflicts.

Technological advances offer opportunities for enhancing the protection of civilians. At the same time, increasingly autonomous weapon systems bring with them new protection challenges, such as difficulties explaining artificial intelligence and machine learning-based systems, the black box phenomenon or biases related to the massive processing and streamlining of data. In order to prevent the emergence of potentially indiscriminate high-impact weapons adding to the myriad challenges civilians are already facing, it is clear to Austria that humans must retain sufficient control over emerging autonomous weapon systems. Technology deciding over life and death is morally repugnant and politically unacceptable; it is essential to act soon before those technologies harm civilians. As the International Committee of the Red Cross recently stated, new legally binding rules to maintain human control over autonomous weapons are urgently required.

For many years, Austria has been calling and working for better implementation of international humanitarian law. It is alarming that in the twenty-first century, violations of international humanitarian law are not only on the increase again but seem to have become a strategic means for trying to win armed conflicts. In today's world, unfortunately, we need to even enhance our efforts and intensify our advocacy. We believe that accountability and the fight against impunity for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are central to ensuring lasting peace. We wish to highlight the important role of the International Criminal Court in this regard.

It is crucial that we remind all actors involved of their obligation to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, and in particular to ensure that civilians are protected; that hospitals, health centres and schools are not targeted; and that humanitarian workers are not denied access to people in need.

In order to promote and enhance the protection of civilians, and thereby the sustainable prevention of violations of international humanitarian law, Austria regularly organizes trainings to convey core knowledge about the application of international law, in particular human rights law and international humanitarian law, to international military and security forces. Austria also offers a United Nations-certified course on the applicable legal framework for the protection of civilians, and in particular the protection of health care, which aims to create better awareness at the operational level. This course, which also taken place despite the global pandemic, also includes several topics pertinent to the women and peace and security agenda.

Finally, Austria welcomes the possibility to contribute to this open video-conference by means of submitting a written statement for a second year in a row. As the epidemiological situation in New York is improving steadily and vaccines become more available, we hope, that the next open debate on the protection of civilians will be held in the in-person format we have been used to for most years.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, Yashar Aliyev**

At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of China for having convened this important meeting.

Although international norms and institutional activities on the protection of civilians in armed conflict have developed significantly over the years, serious challenges remain, including hate-driven violence, increased levels of displacement and a lack of accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Azerbaijan has seriously suffered from the devastating effects of the war unleashed against it by Armenia in the early 1990s. As a result, a part of my country was seized and subsequently remained under occupation for almost 30 years. The war claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people. In addition to the earlier expulsion of over 200,000 Azerbaijanis from Armenia, all occupied territories were ethnically cleansed of their population of more than 700,000.

Some of the offences committed by Armenian forces during the conflict, such as the brutal killing within a very few hours of hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians in the town of Khojaly in February 1992, which constitutes a war crime, also amount to crimes against humanity and acts of genocide. The scale of the atrocities is evidenced, inter alia, by the case of about 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan, including 719 civilians, who went missing in connection with the conflict. Armenia still refuses to account for these persons or to conduct investigations into their fate.

Another act of aggression by Armenia at the end of September 2020 and the subsequent combat actions caused numerous casualties among Azerbaijani civilians. The shelling with prohibited cluster munitions and ballistic missiles of major cities and towns of Azerbaijan, located far from the front line where there were no military targets, resulted in the killing of 101 Azerbaijani civilians, including 12 children. Over 400 civilians were wounded, some 84,000 people were forced to leave their homes and hundreds of civilian objects were either destroyed or damaged.

In the course of the combat actions, Azerbaijan liberated more than 300 cities, towns and villages from occupation. These areas provided vast evidence of the horrifying scale of destruction and looting carried out by the aggressors. The Government of Azerbaijan prioritized their rehabilitation and reconstruction to ensure the safe return of the displaced population and post-conflict peacebuilding.

However, even after the cessation of hostilities, hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians were killed or seriously wounded as a result of mine explosions in the liberated territories. Armenia refuses to share information about the landmines, thereby deliberately targeting human lives and attempting to impede the return of internally displaced persons.

As Armenia continues to disseminate falsehoods, stir up enmity, glorify war criminals, hatch revanchist aspirations and threaten to use force again, it is important to end impunity for the war that it unleashed and the thousands of civilians whom it killed and tortured.

The Secretary-General underlines in his report (S/2021/423) that what is needed urgently now is the political will to respect the rules, implement good practices, prosecute perpetrators and ensure reparations for victims, bearing in mind that accountability for serious violations must be systematic and universal.

Annex 21**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Rabab Fatima**

We thank the Chinese presidency for organizing today's open debate. My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (annex 54).

Indeed, the sufferings of people caught up in armed conflicts have been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease pandemic. On the one hand, the restrictions of movement and other pandemic-related measures have reduced the ability of humanitarian actors and medical professionals to respond to the needs in many conflict settings; on the other hand, the process for the peaceful resolution of conflicts has also been negatively impacted. This calls for renewed commitment on the part of the international community, the Security Council in particular, to the protection of civilians.

We thank the Secretary-General for his informative report (S/2021/423), which presents a vivid picture of the continued sufferings of civilians due to armed conflicts, urban warfare and related phenomena, such as acute hunger and forced displacement, especially during the year 2020. We also thank him for his practical and timely recommendations.

We appreciate his continued emphasis on accountability for non-compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and other recommendations, such as on withholding arms transfers where there is a clear risk that these will be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law or international human rights law. We also agree with the Secretary-General that we need to take measures to break the cycle between conflict and food insecurity, including by finding political solutions to conflict and addressing multiple drivers of acute food insecurity.

Bangladesh promotes the protection of civilians from a principled position. The haunting memory of genocide committed against our people during our War of Liberation in 1971 inspired Bangladesh to commit itself to the protection of civilians. We are a party to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and its additional protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, among others, and almost all the major disarmament instruments.

Our peacekeepers are our primary agents in various conflict-affected countries, where they fulfil their duties with utmost dedication. In spite of the growing and complex protection challenges in the operating environments, compounded by the pandemic, our peacekeepers have been discharging their protection of civilians mandates, often at the cost of their lives. In 2020 alone, Bangladesh lost 12 individuals in the line of their duties for world peace.

Last year, following the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, Bangladesh, along with several other Member States, issued a joint statement supporting the call. It was endorsed by 180 Member States, and we are happy to see the call being reflected in the Security Council's resolutions.

However, we continue to express our concern at the limited application of the ceasefire call in certain parts of the world, including in Myanmar. As reflected in the report of the Secretary-General, humanitarian access has been hindered in Myanmar due to continued restrictions. There were also attacks against health-care personnel in Myanmar during the reporting period, resulting in deaths.

The failure to protect civilians in armed conflict undermines the very purpose of the United Nations as a multilateral organization. We must renew our political commitments and redouble our efforts to ensure better protection of civilians, including those who are the most vulnerable. Let me share some of our thoughts in this regard.

First, States should take the primary responsibility to protect civilians within their territories, including during armed conflict. It is important to promote respect for international humanitarian law, irrespective of sides. Developing national policy frameworks, such as becoming party to international humanitarian legal instruments and incorporating international humanitarian legal norms into national laws, is critical in this regard. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been playing an important role in supporting Member States in this regard, which should be complemented by other stakeholders as well.

Secondly, protection of civilians mandates in peacekeeping settings need to be fully supported by viable strategies, capacities, adequate resources and the coordinated efforts of all actors on the ground. New developments and trends make this more imperative. The United Nations country team and peacekeeping missions should further develop their capabilities for early-warning signs, situational awareness and evidence-based reporting of facts, and work more closely with host Governments and other stakeholders to deter possible escalation of violence.

Thirdly, the unhindered and safe passage of relevant humanitarian personnel and supplies to civilians in need must be ensured by all parties in armed conflicts. Medical facilities, educational institutions, especially schools, and places of worship should be kept out of harm's way during violence and conflicts. Governments have a particular responsibility to ensure the safety of humanitarian actors and to safeguard key civilian infrastructures that are critical to the delivery of essential services.

Fourthly, States should establish appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to fulfil their disarmament commitments, including those related to such conventional weapons as landmines and other explosive devices. Such lethal weapons, with their indiscriminate killing capacities and impact over large areas, must not be used against civilians. Those who commit such violations must be held accountable.

Fifthly, violence against women and children in armed conflicts remains a growing phenomenon that must be ended through collective action. Bangladesh has historically been associated with the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. We believe that uniformed female personnel can play a pivotal role in protecting women from violence and supporting them in crisis. We therefore actively champion the women and peace and security agenda. In the same vein, we see merit in redoubling our efforts to promote the youth and peace and security agenda for advancing protection of civilians mandates in vulnerable settings.

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

Annex 22**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations**

Belgium aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and its member States (annex 31), as well as with the statement of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (annex 54).

We welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/423) and note with great concern the alarming picture that it once again paints. Violence against civilians remains widespread, despite broad support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. The coronavirus disease pandemic has exacerbated protection concerns and continues to be used as a pretext to shrink civic and humanitarian space.

The report also provides us with a sobering account of the lack of compliance with international humanitarian law, the failing protection of medical care and the toll these failures take on civilians. Five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), attacks on medical workers and facilities continue unabated.

Respect for international humanitarian law is the cornerstone of the protection of civilians agenda, including the protection of medical care. We call on all Member States to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including by integrating measures to protect health-care and medical personnel in their partnered military operations, and to safeguard humanitarian space, including in counter-terrorism and sanctions contexts.

The fight against impunity for the most serious crimes is one of Belgium's priorities and one of the shared values of the European Union. Belgium continues to support international justice and accountability mechanisms, including the work and independence of the International Criminal Court, and urges all United Nations Members to do the same. We recognize that comprehensive casualty recording can provide important evidence for accountability processes and the effective investigation and prosecution of violations of international law, as well as to substantiate widespread patterns of harm.

At the same time, protecting civilians should not be understood solely through the prism of compliance with international humanitarian law. Respect for international law is just the bare minimum. Protection of civilians is also a key component of the spectrum of assistance to affected populations and the engagement of the United Nations and other international and regional peace operations in conflict situations, in line with their respective mandates.

In the same vein, Belgium systematically calls attention to the plight of children, who are the most vulnerable victims of conflicts and humanitarian disasters. Neglecting children in situations of armed conflict is setting those societies up for failure even after the conflict has ended. Belgium remains committed to addressing the needs of children affected by armed conflict, facilitating their access to education and intensifying work to prevent and address grave violations against them. We therefore call for implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and call upon all Member States to endorse it.

Lastly, the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians also highlights the natural environment as a "silent casualty" of armed conflict (S/2021/423, para.20). We commend the report's increased attention to the particular vulnerability of conflict-affected populations vis-à-vis the adverse consequences of climate change and environmental degradation. Indeed, the world's worst food crises are all linked to both conflict and climate shocks. It is our common responsibility to

gain a better understanding of such linkages and protect the natural environment in armed conflict. The publication of the 2020 update of the *Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict* by the International Committee of the Red Cross provides us with the recommendations necessary to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. Protecting the environment protects civilians.

Annex 23**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

I would like to thank China for organizing this year's open debate on the protection of civilians and commend it for the excellent concept note (see S/2021/468, annex). I would also like to extend our gratitude to the briefers for their presentations. Brazil associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (annex 54).

The evolution of the Security Council's treatment of the protection of civilians, from broad guidance to increasingly detailed and prescriptive language, is remarkable. Yet the strengthened protection of civilians architecture has not been enough to significantly reduce the heavy civilian toll of armed conflicts. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423) indicates, for instance, at the end of 2020 more than 99 million people faced acute food insecurity in 23 States in which conflict and insecurity played a major role in driving hunger, up from 77 million in 2019. Looking at the numbers, it seems that no matter how far we advance in developing the protection of civilians framework, alleviating the suffering of the civilian population during warfare remains an elusive goal. That apparent paradox should not be seen as a failure in our efforts to effectively protect civilians. It should rather be understood as a stark reminder of the human devastation that armed conflicts cause and a clear call to strengthen efforts to prevent them.

As the concept note highlights, ceasefires around the world contributed to reducing civilian deaths and injuries in 2020, as compared to 2019. That fact reinforces the message that Brazil has constantly expressed in the Council — that the best way to effectively protect civilians is to avoid or cease hostilities in the first place. Brazil has endorsed the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal and hopes that it can be swiftly implemented. As the protection of civilians has been included on the Security Council's agenda for nearly 22 years, the international community must go beyond any one-dimensional understanding of the protection of civilians as only to consist of saving lives from imminent danger. The protection of civilians also means preventing armed conflicts and, when they erupt, finding political, locally owned and sustainable solutions to them.

This open debate marks five years since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of medical care in armed conflicts. Brazil strongly supports the call contained in that landmark resolution for respect for international law aimed at the protection of the wounded and sick, as well as the medical mission during hostilities. It is unacceptable that in many countries, hospitals and medical personnel continue to be attacked. That results not from shortcomings in the normative framework but rather from the lack of respect for international humanitarian law. Respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law is not only a moral imperative but also a legal obligation emanating from the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has demonstrated not only the renewed importance of resolution 2286 (2016) but also the need to effectively implement it. Brazil takes the view that health emergencies should be treated as such even when they arise as a result of armed conflicts and the activities of international organizations should occur only with the consent of the affected countries. That goes hand in hand with every State's responsibility to protect its own population. It is also connected to the importance of all parties to armed conflicts facilitating safe and unimpeded passage for relief actions that are humanitarian and impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, in line with international humanitarian law. Moreover, in the light of the dire effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

in the already vulnerable health systems of conflict zones, the message contained in resolution 2565 (2021) is of the utmost importance. It is imperative to promote universal and equitable access to safe, effective and affordable vaccines for all.

The pandemic has also directly affected the lives and work of United Nations peacekeepers. Brazil commends their efforts in implementing the protection of civilian mandates despite the additional challenges brought about by COVID-19. We also reiterate the need to ensure that those mandates, when authorized, are sufficiently clear, so that peacekeepers, especially the Commanders, understand precisely what is expected of them, without hampering the autonomy that leaders require in the field. It is also important to provide realistic mandates with feasible tasks based on military, political and legal perspectives. Brazil underscores the call by the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians for sufficient resources to be provided to peacekeeping operations that are consistent with the mandate and the situation on the ground. We also reiterate the demonstrated benefits that an increased presence of women in peacekeeping brings to conflict-affected areas, including but not limited to the protection of civilians.

In conclusion, let me once again reiterate Brazil's commitment to the protection of civilians agenda — an agenda that should neither be too narrow to address only physical protection nor too broad to disregard the division of labour among different United Nations organs. Above all, it should be an agenda that has at its core the first objective of the United Nations, which is to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and therefore from the civilian suffering that war necessarily brings with it.

Annex 24**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations**

[Original: English and French]

I thank China for convening today's important open debate on the protection of civilians. Canada welcomes the annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423) and his call for the political will to prioritize the protection of civilians in conflict settings.

We commend the important progress that has been made to advance and expand the agenda, including through the specific Security Council resolutions on the protection of medical missions (resolution 2286 (2016)), conflict and hunger (resolution 2417 (2018)), the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict (resolution 2475 (2019)) and the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population (resolution 2573 (2021)).

However, there remains a glaring gap between the commitments expressed and the practical steps taken to respond to protection challenges. Scrupulous adherence to international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law is urgently needed.

Civilians are disproportionately impacted by conflicts, particularly women, girls and gender-diverse persons, while their protection challenges have been further compounded by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its secondary impacts. We reaffirm our support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in accordance with resolution 2532 (2020) and for the full implementation of resolution 2565 (2021) on the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Canada is appalled that, as the world continues to grapple with the impacts of COVID-19, some parties to conflict continue to conduct unlawful, indiscriminate and targeted attacks against civilians, humanitarian and medical workers, hospitals and schools, while humanitarian access is obstructed or hindered, including in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and the Tigray region in Ethiopia.

Deliberate attacks and violence perpetrated against medical personnel and facilities have serious implications for humanitarian operations and adverse consequences for vulnerable populations in accessing health care, especially women and girls. They endanger health-care providers and undermine health systems and long-term public health goals. Worse, national and local responders, who are often on the front lines of humanitarian responses, continue to bear the heaviest burden of such attacks as they respond to the life-saving needs of communities.

As we mark the fifth anniversary of resolution 2286 (2016), we reiterate our call for its full implementation and greater accountability for attacks on health services.

Conflict-related sexual violence and the recruitment and use of child soldiers continue to be perpetuated by some parties to conflict.

In addition to conflict, climate change is intensifying humanitarian and protection needs, leading to acute food insecurity and famine.

Those trends all highlight the urgent need for bold action and strong political will by the Council, Member States and parties to armed conflict in order to prioritize the protection of civilians and the implementation of this critical agenda.

We must collectively step up our efforts on a number of fronts.

First, we must ensure accountability for violations. We urge the Council to call for full accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including through swift and transparent investigations

into violations. Canada is fully committed to supporting the prevention of, and accountability for, attacks in accordance with its obligations under international law, including through the International Criminal Court, independent investigative and fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry, among others. For example, Canada is contributing to the joint mission of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate human rights violations committed in the context of the Tigray conflict and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

Secondly, we must step up our efforts to ensure more nuanced and context-specific action through the use of time-sensitive and disaggregated data. Based on Canada's experience, data and reporting help to inform analyses and decision-making processes and ultimately improve protection outcomes. Canada is proud to support organizations like the International NGO Safety Organization, whose work is critical to a deeper understanding of conflict dynamics in humanitarian context, which helps to assess risks and plan for the protection of staff.

Thirdly, gender-responsive approaches are needed to effectively respond to the diverse and distinct protection needs and priorities of civilians, including the unique needs of women, in particular young women and girls. That includes the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity in the development of protection strategies and approaches, including those mandated by the Council, as well as supporting the empowerment and protection of women peacebuilders and human rights defenders in situations of armed conflict.

Finally, the full implementation of protection of civilians mandates by United Nations peace operations, including specialized mandates for the protection of children and women, must be prioritized. Protection mandates need to be effectively matched with sufficient resources and progressive policies, including by better aligning the Council, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Fifth Committee in that regard. The protection of civilians must be prioritized through mission drawdowns, transitions and exit strategies.

Canada is proud to have played a pivotal role in establishing the protection of civilians item on the agenda of the Security Council more than 20 years ago.

Canada remains principled in its approach and persistent in its advocacy to uphold and advance the protection of civilians agenda.

We are working to implement a comprehensive protection of civilians agenda through foreign policy, humanitarian, peacekeeping, legal and military efforts. That includes our endorsement of key political commitments, including the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Paris Commitments, as well as leadership on initiatives such as the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and Preventing the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. That is in addition to our national-level implementation of other resolutions, such as resolution 2286 (2016).

We will continue working to meet the life-saving needs of civilians who have been impacted by conflict and displacement when violations occur. Last year, Canada supported more than 60 countries and territories with bilateral humanitarian assistance and responded to 37 natural disasters. Canada's funding helped provide a range of support, from reproductive-health services for more than 330,000 Yemeni women and girls to emergency-shelter protection, clean water and life-saving food assistance for an estimated 7.1 million crisis-affected people in South Sudan.

You can count on Canada to continue to keep civilians at the centre of its protection efforts.

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

[Original: Spanish]

First of all, Chile would like to thank the Permanent Mission of China for convening this timely debate within the framework of the Protection of Civilians Week. We also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423).

The protection of civilians is a duty that has been conferred upon us and addressing the issue warrants our undivided attention and commitment. Accordingly, we acknowledge the priority accorded to the issue on the Security Council's agenda, which is reflected both in its thematic and country-specific debates and decisions. However, as the Secretary-General rightly points out, although the normative framework for the protection of civilians has expanded, its implementation remains inadequate.

The challenges involved in ensuring the safety and security of civilians remain increasingly complex and interrelated. Civilians are vulnerable to other factors related to conflicts, from the adverse effects of climate change and food insecurity to the various effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

In the same context, despite international efforts to address those challenges, the reality on the ground continues to draw our attention to women and girls, who are suffering from an alarming increase in sexual and gender-based violence and as victims of abusive practices owing to their vulnerable situation. We also remain concerned about civilian casualties resulting from improvised explosive devices, armed clashes on the ground and collateral damage from air strikes, as well as the thousands of people who suffer from hunger in conflict settings caused by those who use starvation as a tactic of war.

The situation of children in several conflict areas remains equally concerning. The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures that have been taken to contain it have disrupted children's access to education, health care and social services. In addition, school closures, including those caused by attacks, have increased the vulnerability of tens of thousands of children who have abandoned their studies to fight on the front lines. That situation has been exacerbated by various kinds of attacks that expose children to increased risks of abduction, sexual violence and recruitment and, consequently, to serious long-term effects on their physical and mental health.

We note that the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences add to the challenges mentioned above. However, they also provide us with the opportunity to move forward in strengthening the implementation of the framework of international law, including international humanitarian law and all relevant instruments, which must be upheld by all parties to armed conflict. In particular, it is important to highlight the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, to which Chile is a signatory.

As far as accountability measures are concerned, they should be implemented by putting victims at the centre of all efforts. In that regard, strengthening the capacity of national institutions for access to justice, as well as international monitoring and complaint mechanisms, is fundamental in order to prevent impunity and thereby crimes affecting the most vulnerable populations.

Chile recognizes that the full, equal and meaningful participation of uniformed and civilian women in peacekeeping operations can contribute to strengthening cooperation between civilians and personnel while increasing the credibility of

missions among populations, which is an important component for the success of peace processes and conflict resolution.

It is important that we continue to develop efforts to ensure that our contingents in peace missions are properly equipped with the protection elements and tools necessary for the successful accomplishment of their objectives. It is also important to select and appoint personnel who are properly trained before deployment and who continue to receive training during the mission to ensure their capacity and willingness to help mitigate the risk to civilians before, during and after any operation while taking into account the risk assessment on the ground.

Moreover, Chile believes that it is not only important to protect civilians but also to empower and support them, not as victims but as agents of their own stories and leaders of their communities. In that regard, it is important for United Nations peacekeeping missions to recognize that a sustainable approach to civilian protection must be based on the engagement of local communities, considering their specific contexts and needs. It is important to acknowledge that we, as Member States, must fulfil our protection mandate to ensure that civilians can heal and move towards resilience and recovery.

Annex 26**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Maritza Chan**

I thank the President of the Security Council for convening this meeting on an essential matter. Costa Rica is deeply disturbed by accounts of civilian death and victimization in conflict settings around the world and therefore appreciates the urgency of this discussion.

Costa Rica also appreciates the six focus issues in the concept note (S/2021/468, annex), which are all of critical importance to civilian protection and global peace and security. Despite the diversity of those topics, Costa Rica wishes to draw attention to a common framework to tackle each of them more effectively, namely robust and effective arms control mechanisms.

From Gaza to Myanmar, we are deeply concerned about the massive circulation and widespread availability of arms and ammunition. Compounded by deficient regulation mechanisms, the spread of arms puts civilians at heightened risk of being wounded or killed before, during or after an armed conflict. Costa Rica reiterates that robust and effective regulations, particularly for standards of transfer, are key to the civilian protection agenda.

Moreover, we believe that we cannot sincerely champion the protection of civilians without casting a critical eye over the weapons that placed civilians in the crossfire in the first instance. Ceasing arms transfers to countries that are involved, or likely to become involved, in conflict is one of the most clear-cut and effective ways that States can fulfil their responsibility to protect civilian populations.

We cannot seriously pursue conflict prevention and peacebuilding without effective arms control mechanisms, particularly with regard to small arms, light weapons and their ammunition but also to landmines and, as several Council members have publicly recognized, improvised explosive devices (IEDs). IEDs pose a serious threat to civilians, State security forces, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. On that note, Costa Rica reiterates its call for the Secretary-General to include a section on the effects of landmines, explosive remnants of war and IEDs on civilians and protectors in his annual report on the protection of civilians.

Costa Rica also appreciates the fourth focus issue of the protection of medical facilities and personnel. In our view, that has a stark, causal connection to excessive military expending. In 2020, global military expenditures increased to \$1,982 billion — an increase of 2.6 per cent in real terms from 2019, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. That is a staggering figure, especially considering the alleged shortage of financial resources to provide vaccines and other support to combat the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Costa Rica reiterates that the protection of civilians agenda does not just apply during conflict; it applies any time that States prioritize militarization over the health and human security of their own citizens, as well as protection support for citizens in other vulnerable contexts.

Despite existing international legal protections, our community of nations cannot be said to honour its obligations to protect civilians in conflict while we continue to ignore the direct, indirect, reverberating and often devastating effects on civilians and infrastructure from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Costa Rica therefore calls on Member States to join in support of a strong draft political declaration on strengthening the protection of civilians from humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The implementation of a protection of civilians agenda remains too often deficient, with discernible shortages in capacity, support, motivation, effectiveness and, most importantly, consensus.

Increasingly, women and girls are a topic of policy discussion here at the United Nations, but the further promotion of their roles within conflict prevention and peace processes remains vital.

Overall, the future success of the protection of civilians depends on recognizing the intersections that exist within multiple lenses, especially with regard to armaments, and then the application of those lenses to diverse protection contexts by the most skilful and inclusive group of stakeholders possible.

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

I thank China for organizing this important debate and I wish to complement the statement of the European Union (annex 31) with the following remarks.

Improving the protection of civilians by the Security Council should focus on the following pillars: first, upholding the prohibition of the use of force; secondly, demanding a ceasefire when fighting erupts; thirdly, ensuring that peacekeeping operations can effectively protect civilians; fourthly, sanctioning belligerents that fail to comply with international humanitarian law; and fifthly, referring each conflict to the International Criminal Court, in line with article 13 (b) of the Rome Statute, so that the Court may be seized of any crimes under its jurisdiction that have been committed in any conflict.

While the Council has paid significant attention to this issue and has adopted products in that regard, and while the existing legal framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts is comprehensive, the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423) confirms once more that it is civilians who bear the brunt of military operations and that civilians have suffered every atrocity imaginable. We believe that the high level of impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law is responsible for the gap between rhetoric and reality.

We wish to highlight three of the devastating consequences suffered by civilians in armed conflict — which Cyprus is all too familiar with, as a victim of foreign aggression — and to suggest relevant policy prescriptions for the Council to integrate in its deliberations and products: mass displacements; missing persons; and sexual and gender-based violence.

First, mass and forcible displacement, including of a chronic character, is a hallmark of conflict that often goes unacknowledged and is easily forgotten. The Council must insist on the need to uphold the right to return and the right to property restitution of displaced persons, as well as the unlawfulness of altering the demographic character of areas affected by displacement with a view to consolidating the effects of the use of force.

Secondly, missing persons constitute another humanitarian tragedy that is often overlooked. Civilians are among those persons who disappear during armed conflict after being seized by enemy troops, never to be seen again. Despite the strenuous efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and special commissions designed to uncover the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, many of them are never found and their loved ones are left searching for them for decades. Many ultimately perish without anyone knowing what happened to them.

The Council must call on belligerents in every conflict to register missing persons, fully disclose their fate and whereabouts and cooperate fully on the matter with the international community and the ICRC, including by providing relevant information from archives and full access to possible burial sites. While the Council has already called for that in resolution 2506 (2020), it should adopt specific measures tailored to specific conflicts.

Thirdly, sexual violence and rape continue to be used as a weapon of war in every conflict. The Council must impose robust consequences on perpetrators, both through its sanctions regimes and by ensuring the prosecution of such crimes. The Council should denounce peace agreements that include amnesties for atrocity crimes such as sexual violence.

In conclusion, we wish to stress that, as the host country of a United Nations peacekeeping force since 1964, Cyprus is fully cognizant of the importance of including the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping mandates, as well as the need to enhance that aspect of peacekeeping operations' mandates to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and report such crimes.

Without prejudice to the fact that the primary responsibility to protect civilians always lies with the host country, the Government of Cyprus has always stood ready to cooperate with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus when necessary and within the framework of its mandate in order to support Cyprus's efforts and policies to protect civilians within its territory.

Annex 28**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations, Cristian Espinosa Cañizares**

[Original: Spanish]

Ecuador wishes to express its appreciation to the Chinese delegation for the manner in which it has conducted the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May. We thank the President for convening this debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which complements the open debate held on 27 April on indispensable civilian objects (S/2021/410).

We also appreciate the briefings given by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as the contributions of civil society and the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423), which covers the situation of the protection of civilians during the year 2020 and reflects on how the coronavirus disease pandemic has intensified suffering in conflict zones.

Ecuador is concerned by the information contained in the report, which documents the violence, threats and attacks that health-care providers continue to suffer, even five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016). Ecuador rejects and condemns the continued attacks on health services, including the destruction of hospitals. We also condemn and reject the use of cyberspace to destroy or affect critical infrastructure, including in the area of health.

Despite a robust normative framework, little has been achieved by the international community in the past biennium, following the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions in 2019.

One year ago, which coincided with the first year of the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/366) pointed to an extremely precarious and tragic situation, as well as huge gaps and challenges, including that of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Today, the situation has not changed and the conditions on the ground have deteriorated as a result of the pandemic.

Likewise, Ecuador continues to insist on the need for all members of the Organization and all its organs, in particular the Security Council, to rise to meet that existential challenge, for which it is essential to ensure the implementation of resolution 2565 (2021) in order to facilitate access and humanitarian aid corridors, as well as the implementation of all resolutions aimed at protecting the population. For that reason, Ecuador co-sponsored resolution 2573 (2021) of 27 April, which strongly condemns attacks directed against civilians.

We are particularly concerned by the military use of schools during armed conflict and call for the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of children were left without access to education due to the digital divide. Furthermore, there is harassment and violence in schools. We regret and condemn the fact that children continue to be the most affected segment of the population in conflict settings.

On the other hand, it is crucial for the Council to consider the evident impact of violence and conflict on women, while promoting and ensuring the participation of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes, including in efforts for the protection of civilians.

Finally, as we are only one month away from commemorating one year since the joint declaration of 172 States in support of the global ceasefire and resolution

2532 (2020), Ecuador considers it appropriate for the Security Council to adopt a mechanism for compliance and monitoring of the implementation of the ceasefire at the global level.

Annex 29**Statement by the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

El Salvador thanks the Chinese presidency for its leadership in organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians. It provides an invaluable opportunity to renew our collective commitment to that Security Council agenda item, while also reminding us that it is civilians who continue to represent the vast majority of victims in conflicts and suffer their short- and long-term effects.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to complying with and implementing the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their additional protocols of 1977, the principal rules of international humanitarian law and the relevant instruments adopted in the context of the work of the Security Council, such as resolution 1265 (1999) and other relevant resolutions. As a whole, those instruments constitute the international normative framework on the basis of which obligations are outlined to guarantee the protection and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially of those who do not or can no longer take part in hostilities.

El Salvador regrets the fact that, despite his call for a global ceasefire to focus attention on the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Secretary-General, in his most recent report on the protection of civilians in 2020 (S/2021/423), presents data showing the ongoing suffering of civilian populations in countries and regions in conflict in the form of high death tolls, injuries and psychological trauma, sexual violence, torture and disappearances, as well as damage to and destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, markets and such other vital civilian infrastructure as systems for the distribution of food, energy and drinking water. In this regard, we express our concern at the exacerbated vulnerabilities faced by tens of thousands of children in conflict zones, who account for a quarter of the civilian casualties caused by mines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, which are in turn aggravated by the measures being taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

El Salvador takes this opportunity to express its full support for resolution 2573 (2021), on the protection of essential infrastructure, adopted in April of this year, while endorsing the condemnation of indiscriminate and/or disproportionate attacks, which deprive the civilian population of goods indispensable for their survival and which constitute flagrant violations of international law. At the same time, we demand that all parties to armed conflicts comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The world continues to face challenges resulting from the pandemic, whose effects continue to be felt by people in different countries and regions of the world. That is why we reiterate the relevance and fundamental role of resolution 2565 (2021), on humanitarian assistance in response to COVID-19. In addition to guaranteeing the protection and access of medical and humanitarian personnel, the cessation of hostilities between the parties to conflict guarantees the care of affected populations, access to supplies and the provision of health services. El Salvador also reiterates the importance of compliance with resolution 2532 (2020), which calls for a general and immediate ceasefire of hostilities in order to focus on humanitarian relief and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

We appreciate the solidarity and cooperation that different countries have extended to El Salvador to ensure access to vaccines against COVID-19. We further commend the efforts of the COVAX facility for global access to COVID-19 vaccines

aimed at providing the broadest and most equitable possible international access worldwide. El Salvador subscribes to the premise that we will not be safe until there is access to vaccines in all corners of the world.

As a contributor of military troops and police forces, El Salvador acknowledges the fundamental role played by United Nations peacekeepers in reducing acts of violence against civilians. Efforts to ensure that peacekeepers receive the COVID-19 vaccine without delay should be recognized and promoted so as to guarantee the safety and security of peacekeepers in the field.

El Salvador reaffirms its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2, which aims at ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. It acknowledges that food insecurity can be caused by different factors, such as economic crises, climate change, and conflict and political instability. In this regard, we reiterate the importance of keeping resolution 2417 (2018) in force and remaining in strict compliance with it. We support the efforts of the Council to provide effective responses to humanitarian needs in armed conflicts, including with respect to the threat of famine, as well as to condemn starvation of civilian populations as a method of warfare.

We are concerned that some peacekeeping operations are increasingly highlighting such potential threats to food security as obstruction of access to or distribution of humanitarian aid, threats made against peacekeeping personnel, and non-compliance with United Nations agreements with host countries, all of which are actions that jeopardize access to food and other necessities for civilians in situations of conflict. Accordingly, the Security Council must act and hold accountable those who stand in the way of this important work, which is protected by international humanitarian law. We call on all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and stress the importance of humanitarian personnel having safe and unhindered access to civilians.

In the light of this concern, we believe that the establishment of a United Nations focal point or special envoy for food security and for the implementation of resolution 2417 (2018) is important. In addition, the work of such a focal point or special envoy could include seeking funding for activities that help mitigate food insecurity resulting from climate change, conflicts and pandemics, particularly in countries and regions facing armed conflict or political instability.

At the national level, El Salvador remains committed to the implementation of international humanitarian law. In 1997, the Salvadoran State created the Inter-institutional Committee on International Humanitarian Law in El Salvador (CIDIH-ES), which is an advisory body to the Government of the Republic on measures for the effective application and dissemination of international instruments on international humanitarian law, as well as on national or international legal norms applicable in this area, especially the provisions set forth in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977. Different ministries of the executive branch, including those dealing with foreign affairs, justice and security, education, national defence and public health participate in the CIDIH-ES, as do the Attorney General of the Republic, the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman and the Salvadoran Red Cross. In order for their functions to be carried out effectively, a permanent secretariat and working subcommissions coordinate these institutions' participation in such areas as legislation, outreach and training in the field, and the protection of cultural property.

Finally, El Salvador reiterates its firm conviction that the most effective way to protect civilians is simply to prevent conflicts, which can be done through investment for development, the promotion of peaceful solutions to disputes, attention to

countries and regions in post-conflict situations, and efforts aimed at consolidating stability through advancing a culture of peace and respect for international law. The protection of civilians must be a priority in the work of the United Nation, taking precedence over any geopolitical interests that may be at odds with this cause. True protection requires the commitment of all States Members of the United Nations to protecting the human dignity of all people, without discrimination.

Annex 30**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, Taye Atskeselassie Amde**

We wish first to thank the President of the Security Council for organizing today's important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We also thank all the briefers for their briefings.

Ethiopia attaches great importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and welcomes the Council's attention to this thematic issue. My country has been a State party to the Geneva Conventions since 1949 and of the fourth Convention, on the protection of civilians, since 1969. In its long history and fights to preserve its sovereign integrity, Ethiopia has also been on the receiving end of violations of the protection of civilians.

In our age, conflicts and threats continue to evolve and take on complex dynamics. In this context, it is appropriate to give proper attention to deliberate tactics used by States and groups, or the combined efforts of the two, to create havoc by targeting civilians and civilian sites to cause outrage and undermine national authority. These problems are primarily faced by developing countries such as mine.

Attacks against civilians jeopardize sustainable peace and hard-won development gains. They distance peacemaking and reconciliation and risk eroding the fabric of social cohesion. That is the reason irresponsible actors that are set on causing the absolute annihilation of nations engage in the destruction of civilian sites, including schools, hospitals, energy-generating plants, markets and other places of superior public significance. In considering these organized and excessively armed crimes, the international system ought to look beyond the immediate inclinations adverse to the stance of national Governments, especially those in developing countries, and seek a solution based on national context and real geopolitical factors at play.

It is indeed encouraging that the protection of civilians is now a key pillar of all peacekeeping operations mandates. As a major troop-contributing country to United Nations peace operations, Ethiopia places great emphasis on deploying contingents who are adequately trained, vetted, equipped and instructed on protecting civilians. We continue to advocate for partnership and greater cooperation among the Member States and the United Nations to bolster context-specific in-mission training.

Let me now turn to a challenge we faced in Ethiopia, mentioned both by Council members and in the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/423). Since November 2020, the Government of Ethiopia has been engaged in a law-enforcement operation to safeguard the constitutional order. The attack on the Ethiopian National Defense Forces posed a grave threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ethiopian State.

I appreciate the different forms of sentiments expressed by members of the Council. I also appreciate the cooperation availed to my Government in the field of humanitarian assistance. However, I take this opportunity to relay our concern on the overly politicized approach being taken over what is an internal affair of a State Member of the United Nations. The Government of Ethiopia has an inherent responsibility to preserve the unity and sovereign integrity of the Ethiopian State. Similarly, the Government has an obligation to protect its citizens from any internal or external threat against their lives or well-being. Through the law-enforcement operation against a criminal terrorist group, the Government of Ethiopia is discharging the innate responsibility that any sovereign country would undertake. This Council does not need a reminder of measures taken by Member States against what they consider to be threats located across the seas.

The positions being reflected by some delegations, including in this Council, characterizing the situation in Ethiopia as a subject matter for international forums or equating the Government of Ethiopia with a criminal terrorist group, are highly regrettable. Nor does this approach help efforts to ensure cooperation to reach innocent citizens trapped in a difficult situation.

It is also pivotal for humanitarian actors, including United Nations agencies, to operate on the basis of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Humanitarian actors must respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. The Government of Ethiopia resents the statements and conduct of humanitarian actors and officials that have gone to great lengths to advance a political cause at the expense of the rights and well-being of people and the sovereignty and image of a sovereign nation. The past few months have given us a practical lesson on how much work has to be done to ensure that humanitarian work adheres to the core principles enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

It is of critical importance that the Council exercise due care to prevent the damage that may be caused by politically motivated reports and analysis coming from some humanitarian actors and officials.

As a State with a long history of Government and independent existence, Ethiopia will take the measures necessary to protect its unity and territorial integrity. In addition, it will make the utmost effort to protect its public from all vices, including the attacks from domestic criminal groups that intend to destabilize the nation.

We uphold our obligations under national and international laws. Further, we will realize our obligation for justice and accountability to reign over perpetrators of crimes, despite their status and affiliation. In this regard, we applaud the help we received to fill in the gap in the provision of basic needs for our citizens.

Annex 31**Statement by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, in its capacity as observer**

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

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

The protection of civilians in armed conflict remains of key importance for the EU and its member States. We welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/423) and note with great concern the alarming picture that it paints. Indeed, the coronavirus disease pandemic exacerbated protection concerns. The fighting continues in many conflicts, despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

First, full compliance with international humanitarian law remains central for the protection of civilians. We call on all parties to armed conflict to respect their obligations. The EU remains committed to putting the promotion of and adherence to international humanitarian law at the heart of its external action. This includes supporting training and exercises to respect international humanitarian law, in particular for military and security forces, as well as for non-State armed groups. It also includes leveraging the EU's political, economic and military weight to promote international humanitarian law compliance, as outlined by the European Commission's recent communication on the EU's humanitarian action.

The EU is also committed to continuing to advocate for the universalization of international humanitarian law instruments and support the fight against impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law. The EU calls on States that have not yet done so to ratify and fully implement important international humanitarian law instruments, such as the 1977 additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions, as well as the Rome Statute, and to develop and adopt any necessary implementing legislation, policies and practical measures.

Ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law is crucial when armed conflicts are increasingly fought in urban areas, exposing civilians and civilian infrastructure to substantial risks. We recognize the challenges associated with the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas and the impact on civilians, particularly in many recent conflicts, and we strongly call on all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with international humanitarian law. Promoting compliance with international humanitarian law has always been, and remains, a top priority for the EU and its member States. We also fully support the implementation of resolutions 2532 (2020), 2565 (2021) and 2573 (2021).

Furthermore, effective investigations into and prosecutions of alleged war crimes are equally indispensable to ensure deterrence and provide justice for victims alike. To that end, the EU and its States members are strong supporters of international criminal justice, in particular the International Criminal Court, as the world's beacon of accountability and the only permanent international criminal court. It also commends the key supporting role of international investigation and investigation mechanisms to the prosecution by competent courts and the establishment of truth. Additionally, the exercise of universal jurisdiction at the national level can serve as an effective mechanism to ensure accountability for serious international crimes.

Secondly, addressing the protection risks and needs of civilians affected by conflicts remains crucial. Supporting the efforts of the Inter-Agency Standing

Committee/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs secretariat to advance the centrality of protection and ways to strengthen protection outcomes is critical in that regard. That is a key component of the EU's humanitarian assistance. The EU is specifically committed to addressing the needs of children affected by armed conflict, facilitating access to safe education supporting initiatives to roll out the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Paris Commitments and intensifying work to prevent and addressing grave violations against them. In that regard, the EU welcomes the efforts of the 108 endorsing Member States of the Safe Schools Declaration and strongly supports the children and armed conflict mandate and its monitoring and reporting mechanism. The EU remains equally committed to the protection of women and girls and supporting the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, levels of which have increased drastically during the pandemic, as well as its impacts on sexual and reproductive health. Importantly, the high number of persons with disabilities affected by conflict need to be appropriately taken care of and should not be left behind.

Within the United Nations, there is a specific role for United Nations peacekeeping to ensure the protection of civilians. In order to be able to adequately and effectively carry out that responsibility, missions require mandates with clearer protection of civilians strategies, and peacekeepers need to be appropriately trained. The protection of civilians is a core collective responsibility within United Nations peacekeeping, and more can be done to effectively carry out the task.

Thirdly, the adverse consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, including in relation to armed conflict and the protection of civilians, remain of the utmost concern and require an urgent collective response. The EU condemns the use of the destruction of the environment as a means of warfare, especially where there is direct dependency of the civilian population on its natural resources for water, food and livelihoods, or scarce access to them. The EU and its States members are committed to advocating globally for the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict through supporting compliance with international humanitarian law and taking all appropriate measures to address the protection needs of civilians.

Fourthly, the EU and its States members note with grave concern the latest statistics on food insecurity, which are unprecedented in both scale and severity. We welcome the international efforts to address the crisis, such as the Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact of the Group of Seven and the increased allocations for humanitarian assistance by the main global donors, including the EU. However, such efforts remain insufficient to cover the needs. We call on increased contributions from international partners, including by broadening the base of donors to the United Nations-coordinated financial system and exploring possibilities to increase flexible and unarmarked funding.

Conflict remains the main driver of hunger and more efforts are needed to alleviate hunger in armed conflict in line with resolution 2417 (2018). Conflict displaces people, damages vital infrastructure, disrupts local markets and reduces access, resulting in the destruction of food systems and widespread food insecurity. In conflict-affected areas, securing rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and respect for international humanitarian law is of the utmost importance. The EU and its States Members are intensifying their advocacy efforts in that respect and call on Security Council members to join forces in the endeavour.

Fifthly, attacks on medical facilities and medical workers in armed conflicts have a devastating impact on the protection of civilians in both the short and long terms. Five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), drafted by

Spain together with Egypt, Japan, New Zealand and Uruguay, in the light of the current pandemic, we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that medical workers and facilities are no longer subject to attacks. Action is needed at the multilateral, national and community levels. The EU is committed to supporting the collection and analysis of data on attacks against medical workers and facilities by the World Health Organization through the surveillance system for attacks on health care to promote peer-to-peer exchanges on data collection and protect victims against international humanitarian law violations. Perpetrators must be held to account. The EU remains firmly engaged in supporting partners to ensure the continuity of medical care in high-risk contexts and assist front line medical personnel.

For the protection of medical personnel and infrastructure, the adoption and implementation of adequate military policies at the strategic, operational and tactical levels throughout military operations are also essential. Training the armed forces is key. Compliance with international humanitarian law and awareness of the protection of civilians are central elements in the planning and conduct of all the civilian and military EU crisis management missions and operations. The International Committee of the Red Cross has also been instrumental in providing practical guidance to that end through the adoption of the guidance document, entitled *Protecting health care: Guidance for the armed forces*.

Beyond medical care, we need to strengthen our efforts to protect humanitarian workers from attacks and safeguard humanitarian space. The EU, together with France, Germany, Mexico, Norway, the Niger, and Switzerland, has started co-hosting a discussion series on the protection of humanitarian and medical workers in armed conflict. That will contribute to the development of key elements of the call for action to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action, launched by Germany and France and endorsed by all the co-hosts of the discussion series. The EU is committed to avoiding any potential negative impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian action.

Finally, the EU and its States members consider the immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good and advocate for equitable, timely and affordable access to effective, safe, and quality vaccines and any other health products related to COVID-19 for all. The EU and its States members support the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility and welcome the establishment of the humanitarian buffer. We will continue ensuring that vaccines reach all who need them, including conflict-affected people, leaving no one behind. We support distribution and vaccination campaigns, promote vaccine sharing and provide support for production capacities.

The effective protection of civilians in armed conflicts requires sustained collective efforts. We count on the Security Council and the international community to take firm and continued action in the endeavour.

Annex 32**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Fiji to the United Nations**

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

In 1999 the Security Council included the protection of civilians in armed conflict, on its annual agenda. Since 2018, one week a year has been dedicated to discussions and debate on the protection of civilians in conflicts to promote awareness and mobilize political action.

The Security Council is mandated to maintain international peace and security. It has the necessary tools at its disposal to protect civilians in armed conflicts. When the Council cannot act decisively and in a timely manner, people suffer, and civilian lives are lost.

On 23 March 2020, the Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire to focus the worlds' attention on combating the coronavirus disease pandemic, which compounded conditions caused by conflicts. Unfortunately, that call for a global ceasefire was not heeded. The world lost an opportunity to reduce suffering and save more lives.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2021/423) continues to highlight the widespread suffering of civilians due to conflicts. Civilians are suffering as a result of armed attacks, forced displacement and the blocking and weaponization of humanitarian aid.

The report highlights the real risk of conflicts getting worse, not better. It also drew our attention to the rapid developments in weapons technology and its proliferation, the use of information communications technology and the impact of climate change.

Fiji would like to highlight the following.

Respect for international conventions, awareness and accountability should be the foundation for protecting civilians in armed conflicts. The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of Governments. Member States and others should constantly be made aware of their obligations under international conventions. Conflicts are becoming extraordinary, more complicated, more regional and global and more diverse. We need to be persistent in those efforts.

Given the adverse trends identified by the Secretary-General, it is fair to ask whether the Security Council is doing all it can to implement the protection of civilians mandate. The Council is urged to use all tools at its disposal to protect civilians in armed conflicts. In the past, the United Nations and the Council have established mechanisms to address major violations in the form of tribunals, sanctions, embargoes, commissions of inquiry and investigations. All major violations of international conventions relating to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts should be equally addressed in a timely manner.

The Peacebuilding Commission plays a critical role in reducing risks and preventing conflicts. Investing in prevention and peacebuilding saves lives and money and it increases the chances of peace operations succeeding. It needs to become more central in the protection of civilians toolkit.

The aim of the Sustainable Development Goals is to remove the root causes of conflict. Those include inequality, exclusion and poverty. Peacebuilding, peace operations and development should be more closely integrated. Institutional silos are unhelpful.

Institutions are crucial to maintaining and sustaining peace. Security and justice institutions are important for prevention, peacebuilding and transitioning out of conflict. Building institutions takes time, and they cannot be stop and start investments.

Nearly all peacekeeping missions have an explicit protection of civilians mandate. The international community should provide the adequate resources to United Nations peacekeeping operations so that they can carry out their mandate of fully protecting civilians. United Nations peacekeeping missions have a direct impact on local communities. They are often the only actor on the ground within the United Nations system and can rapidly deploy to protect civilians and open and allow access to humanitarian aid.

Regional organizations play an important role in supporting the protection of civilians obligations of their members. Partnerships with regional institutions are important. They bring an understanding of local dynamics and connections and complement the role of the United Nations and the international community on the ground.

The climate crisis has a major and growing impact on conflicts. The climate crisis in Fiji and the Pacific is triggering the relocation of communities. It impacts food and water security and fuels poverty and inequality. All of those have consequences on conflicts in regions that are highly climate-stressed. Climate action is peace action, as it will reduce the risks of conflicts that are becoming more difficult to resolve.

Fiji is a signatory to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which are aimed at strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Fiji welcomes the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and its emphasis on strengthening all aspects of peacekeeping in order to better protect civilians during armed conflicts.

To rise to that challenge, high performance and standards are required from peacekeepers. Better performance and standards by peacekeepers will improve the protection of civilians, but that must be a sustained effort. Fiji is committed and persistent in its efforts to improve the performance and standards of our peacekeepers.

Annex 33**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations**

At the outset, I would like to thank the Chinese presidency for convening this important debate.

It has been already more than a year since the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic imposed one of the greatest tests on the world since the establishment of the United Nations and exacerbated the vulnerability of the least protected in our society, including civilians, in contexts of conflict.

While we welcome the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423) and share its recommendations, we remain deeply alarmed by its findings that civilians continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts, with civilian casualties reported across several armed conflicts.

It is particularly worrisome that, despite the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire amid the pandemic, we are still witnessing the troubling tendency of continuous armed conflict, which has a deleterious impact on the civilian population as well as humanitarian and medical personnel around the world.

Five years since the adoption of the resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict, its implementation is unfortunately still facing challenges. Regrettably, we continue to witness multiple cases of violence, threats and attacks against medical personnel in violation of international humanitarian law. That tendency is even more alarming amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as health-care systems already weakened by armed conflict have been overwhelmed and health-care services have been undermined at a time when they are most needed.

The only way to protect civilians, including medical personnel, is to respect international humanitarian and international human rights law and to ensure accountability for grave violations in that regard. We fully subscribe to the Secretary-General's statement that it is imperative that parties to conflict comply with international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of all medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, and that Member States step up their efforts to implement resolution 2286 (2016).

In that context, let me underline that Georgia spares no effort in ensuring respect for international humanitarian and international human rights law at both the national and international levels. As a result, the four 1949 Geneva Conventions are part of Georgian legislation. Moreover, Georgia's national interinstitutional commission on the implementation of international humanitarian law — a standing governmental body — leads efforts and coordinates the work of relevant entities aimed at ensuring respect for international humanitarian law.

Georgia also actively supports and has endorsed different international initiatives aimed at the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, including the political declaration on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflict and the Safe Schools Declaration.

Despite the abovementioned efforts, my Government is regrettably continuously prevented from extending its protection to the population residing in the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia, namely Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, also known as South Ossetia. While the world has been busy fighting the pandemic, the livelihoods of our conflict-affected people have further deteriorated due to Russia's destructive actions. The ongoing occupation of those two regions

by the Russian Federation leaves ethnic Georgians continuously deprived of basic human rights, including the right to life, health and property and the right to receive an education in their native language.

The closure of the occupation line and restriction of freedom of movement have had tremendous tragic consequences in both occupied regions. In the Akhgori district of the Tskhinvali region, several dozen people have died due to being denied emergency medical evacuation to Georgia-controlled territory in order to receive the required medical treatment.

Against that background, it is imperative that the Russian Federation, as the occupying Power exercising effective control over the two occupied regions of Georgia — Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia — which has been confirmed in the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights of 21 January, bring to a halt the humanitarian crisis by removing restrictions to the freedom of movement and to the access of the conflict-affected people to health care, as well as by allowing the immediate and unconditional access of international human rights and humanitarian organizations and workers to the occupied territories, as the conflict-affected people are in extraordinary need of assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for the international community to urge the Russian Federation to immediately cease provocations against Georgia and respect its international obligations by starting the implementation of the European Union-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement and withdraw its occupation forces from Georgia's territory.

For its part, my country reiterates its readiness to contribute to the Secretary-General's endeavour to mobilize the international community's political will and commitment to prioritize the protection of civilians, including medical personnel, in armed conflicts.

Annex 34**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Mohammad Kurniadi Koba**

Let me begin by thanking China for organizing this meeting. I also thank today's speakers for their briefings and moving testimonies.

The Security Council must continue exercising its moral weight to protect civilians in armed conflict, especially women and children.

Throughout 2020, armed conflict took a grisly toll, dismantling societies with high levels of civilian death, injury, psychological trauma and the destruction of civilian infrastructure essential to their survival. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further impacted civilian lives in conflict, as it has placed an enormous strain on weak health-care services.

Against that backdrop, I would like to focus my statement on three fundamental points.

First, the ethical principles of health care do not change in times of armed conflict, with or without the pandemic. The principles are simply the same as in times of peace. Privileges and facilities afforded are never to be used for purposes other than for medical duties. No matter the arguments put forward during the COVID-19 pandemic, medical personnel and facilities shall not be the target of violent acts under any circumstances, including armed conflict. Indonesia therefore once again calls for an immediate, global ceasefire to help create corridors for life-saving aid, further peaceful negotiations and bring hope to those who are vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus.

Secondly, Indonesia is a strong proponent of community engagement in protecting civilians. We believe that the comprehensive approach to protecting civilians should be strategic, politically driven and people-centred. Local communities must become part and parcel of the development and implementation of protection of civilians strategy. In that regard, civilian protection programmes should be tailor-made for the needs of affected communities.

That approach certainly complements the use of force and merits recognition for the essential role of peacekeepers in sustaining peace on the ground. To be sustainable, the protection of civilians must be grounded in community engagement and must support community-led protection strategies.

Thirdly, it is critical to place women's empowerment at the heart of protecting civilians. As agents of the protection of civilians, women have greater access to communities. Women are essential enablers in building trust and confidence. Women help prevent and reduce conflict and confrontation. The inclusive participation of women would also benefit any peace process, as women have unique perspectives to offer. Empowering women means empowering the whole nation.

As the initiator and facilitator of resolution 2538 (2020), Indonesia is committed to increasing the number of female peacekeepers contributing to gender parity among the Blue Helmets. We believe that the full, effective and meaningful participation of uniformed and civilian women in peacekeeping operations can contribute to more effective community engagement, as well as the protection of civilians.

The protection of civilians in conflict is a basic principle of humankind. We need to make sure that conflict can be prevented by fostering dialogue. We therefore urge all parties to heed the call for a global ceasefire.

Whether in a pandemic or not, we cannot neglect the critical necessity to provide access to health-care services and facilities on the ground. In that context, we call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law.

Annex 35**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

According to the Secretary-General, in his annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, “Globally, civilian deaths and injuries from the use of explosive weapons reportedly decreased by 43 per cent in 2020” (*S/2021/423, para. 6*). That is indeed good news. Nevertheless, the bad news is that, as he states,

“Armed conflict continued to be characterized by high levels of civilian death, injury and... destroyed homes, schools, markets, hospitals and essential civilian infrastructure” (*ibid., para. 2*).

According to the Secretary-General, “More people were forcibly displaced”. As an example,

“In the West Bank, the Israeli authorities demolished 847 Palestinian structures (homes, water, hygiene and sanitation assets and structures used for agriculture, including 156 structures donated as humanitarian aid), displacing 996 Palestinians” (*ibid., para. 9*).

The Secretary-General also reports that “Tens of thousands of children continued to be killed, maimed” (*ibid., para. 28*), “medical personnel, transports and facilities continue to come under attack” (*ibid., para. 54*), and “at least 169 security incidents against humanitarian workers were recorded in 19 States affected by conflict” (*ibid., para. 43*). He also maintains that “The threat of famine resurfaced, with the worst hunger and highest risks of famine clustered in conflict-affected areas” (*ibid., para. 2*).

In the year 2021, unfortunately, we are experiencing the worst of such cases in the Middle East, a clear example of which is the widespread forced displacement of Palestinian civilians from their homes and lands. While many Palestinians have already been forcibly displaced, it is estimated that around 90,000 Palestinians are at risk of evictions in the occupied East Jerusalem.

The worst is that, when the Palestinians have protested against such unlawful forced eviction, including in Sheikh Jarrah, where they have lived generation after generation, and complained of the attacks on Muslim worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month of Ramadhan, the Israeli security and military forces have committed the most brutal crimes against Palestinians.

During its brutal and all-out 11-day war on Gaza alone, Israel’s forces killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, 39 women and 17 elderly people, and wounded 1,948 others. That includes 13 members of an extended family who have been killed and buried in the rubble of their own home — many of whom were children, one as young as six months. Additionally, Israeli forces also destroyed 30 health facilities, around 50 schools and other education facilities, some 50 per cent of the water network, 33 offices of media organizations and damaged 43 mosques.

Those barbaric acts are clear manifestations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, contravening the most prominent principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience, upon which international humanitarian law is founded. Such crimes which materially breach fundamental norms and principles of international law, entail international responsibility of the Israeli regime, whose officials must therefore be brought to justice for committing such heinous crimes.

It is a source of grave concern that in the face of such vicious crimes, due to the shameful shielding of the Israeli regime by the United States, the Security Council has failed once again to discharge its Charter-based mandate and was unable to issue

even the mildest press statement calling for a halt to the aggression against civilians in Gaza. Obviously, the Council's press statement on 22 May (SC/14527), which was issued after the agreement of the parties regarding the ceasefire, was not of much actual value. Moreover, given that the recent war was sparked by the unlawful and provocative actions of the Israeli regime in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, particularly in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, that regime must be compelled to stop all such actions.

Another example of targeting civilians and civilian objects in our region is the aggression against the people of Yemen, killing more than 16,000 civilians, including more than 4,000 children and 2,500 women, wounding over 25,000 others and destroying or damaging 430,779 homes, 955 mosques, 348 health and medical centres, 917 schools and other education centres and 656 markets. Similarly, the starvation of civilians has been used as a method of warfare, causing the world's worst contemporary humanitarian crisis. All such acts are criminal, violate international law and must stop immediately.

Such cases clearly indicate that, while there are adequate binding rules for the protection of civilians and civilian objects in armed conflicts, non-compliance by certain parties with such norms is deliberate.

The Security Council must therefore take the necessary measures to bring such practices to an immediate end and hold their perpetrators accountable for such crimes. Otherwise, as the Council's inaction in the past with respect to the above-mentioned crimes has emboldened the perpetrators to commit more crimes, its possible inaction in the future would further encourage them to continue violating the relevant norms and principles of international law.

Likewise, other international efforts must be redoubled to further promote the full and effective application of international humanitarian law. The Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to actively and constructively contribute to such efforts.

Annex 36

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations

Italy welcomes this annual open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It aligns itself with the statement of the European Union (annex 31) and is pleased to join the statement of the Group of Friends of the protection of civilians (annex 54), submitted by Switzerland. We would also like to highlight a few points in our national capacity.

This year's thematic report by the Secretary-General (S/2021/423) is a stark reminder that we need to strengthen our efforts and hold true to our responsibility to implement the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, humanity, the distinction between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives, proportionality and military necessity.

As confirmed in the report, the suffering of civilians is exacerbated when conflict and a global pandemic overlap. In such challenging times, the most vulnerable subjects — women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and displaced persons — account for the vast majority of civilians adversely affected by armed conflict and are more exposed to the effects of the pandemic.

Within that context, it is as crucial as ever to protect health-care facilities and medical personnel and to ensure unimpeded, fast and safe access to people living in conflict settings in order to provide them with adequate medical assistance. Currently, as affirmed in the recently adopted resolutions 2565 (2021) and 2573 (2021), health infrastructures are not only indispensable providers of primary health-care services; they are also key pillars of the vaccination campaign and irreplaceable tools to improve the resilience and preparedness of national health systems.

However, five years after the consensus adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel and medical facilities in armed conflicts, which Italy co-sponsored, attacks on hospitals, front-line doctors and humanitarian convoys continue unabated.

Peacekeepers can play a crucial role in protecting both those infrastructures and the civilian populations concerned. Italy appreciates the strong commitment of the Security Council to promoting the protection of civilians as one of the priorities of peacekeeping mandates, with special regard to the most vulnerable categories. We also support an enhanced role of United Nations police personnel in protecting civilians within peacekeeping mandates, and we advocate for a stronger presence of women among the peacekeeping ranks. Italy strongly believes in the benefits provided by the presence of well-integrated women personnel, which can have a significantly positive impact on the pursuit of peace and the protection of civilians.

Another crucial factor in the protection of civilians is accountability. Italy is committed to protecting and promoting international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, and to implementing the principle of accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in situations of armed conflict. In that perspective, we reaffirm our strong support for international justice and accountability mechanisms, including the work and the independent role of the International Criminal Court.

Where conflicts are still ravaging, even war must have its own rules. In that spirit, alongside respect for the entire existing normative framework, Italy supports the draft political declaration aimed at protecting the civilian population from explosive weapons in densely populated areas.

Another important topic underlined in the Secretary-General's report is the impact of the coronavirus disease and its related restrictive measures on children's access to education, health care and social services. School closures have had, and continue to have, a detrimental effect on millions of children worldwide, increasing the risk of child marriage, adolescent pregnancies, sexual exploitation and abuse and recruitment into armed groups. Such violations can also have a long-lasting impact on children's physical and psychological development and undermine their ability to actively shape their future.

Italy is strongly engaged in raising awareness and promoting action to combat all forms of violations against children. On the occasion of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in 2019, Italy presented an open pledge to call on all actors to undertake all the appropriate and necessary actions to reduce the impact of wars on children's lives. Since then, we have spared no efforts in implementing it. That includes promoting the widest possible support for the Safe Schools Declaration in order to mitigate, to the maximum possible extent, the consequences of armed conflicts on education, students, education personnel and school infrastructures.

In conclusion, Italy wishes to reaffirm its strong support for the call of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, and we urge all parties to conflict to lay down their weapons and not to target civilians and, in particular, health-care facilities, schools and related personnel.

Annex 37**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro**

I would like to begin by thanking China for convening this important meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423)

This year marks the fifth anniversary of resolution 2286 (2016), on health care in armed conflict, to which Japan contributed as a co-penholder in 2016. It is regrettable that, according to the Secretary-General's report, we continue to witness increased attacks against medical and humanitarian personnel and their facilities in conflict zones. The safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel is a matter of high priority, particularly during the coronavirus disease pandemic, as recognized in resolution 2565 (2021), in which the Security Council urges all parties to protect the delivery of humanitarian aid for essential services concerning vaccinations and medical care. The Council must use its influence to the fullest extent to facilitate the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In December 2019, Dr. Nakamura Tetsu, the physician and founder-director of a Japanese humanitarian non-governmental organization, was killed in a terrorist attack along with his Afghan colleagues in Jalalabad. Dr. Nakamura devoted himself for decades to the promotion of health-care service and agricultural development for the Afghan people. Japan strongly condemns such heinous attacks against aid workers.

As a champion of resolution 2286 (2016), Japan has made continuous efforts to ensure its full implementation, in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In Afghanistan, Japan has supported efforts to prevent and mitigate violations against medical missions and to ensure access to health-care services, in coordination with parties to conflict. In Iraq and South Sudan, Japan has promoted awareness-raising campaigns among weapons bearers, authorities and communities to sensitize them to the humanitarian consequences of attacks against medical workers.

Japan is committed to protecting and promoting health care on the ground. In February, Japan made a contribution of \$6.6 million to the World Food Programme, the International Organization for Migration and the ICRC to protect the people affected by the military operations in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. This assistance will enable essential health-care facilities to be repaired and 50,000 internally displaced persons to receive medical support, including mental health care. Medical supplies, including hygiene products, will be provided to 28 health-care centres.

Japan firmly believes that international humanitarian law provides a robust legal basis for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Security Council must ensure that the key provisions of international humanitarian law are respected. Furthermore, Japan recognizes the critical role of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission in upholding international humanitarian law and reaffirms its support to the Commission.

Japan is determined to continue making every effort for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including through securing essential health care. We will continue to work closely with other Member States, the United Nations system, international humanitarian organizations and civil-society organizations to contribute to this endeavour.

Annex 38**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Latvia to the United Nations**

Latvia welcomes the Security Council debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Latvia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union (annex 31).

The recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423) outlines the grim reality on the ground, ongoing challenges and fallout of the coronavirus disease pandemic. The urbanization of conflicts, destruction of civilian infrastructure, use of explosive weapons in populated areas and devastating consequences of conflicts, such as hunger, famine, environmental deterioration, large-scale displacement and exacerbated socioeconomic vulnerabilities have been of particular concern. Despite the Secretary-General's call, a global ceasefire remains elusive and conflicts have not shown significant slowing. While some progress is evident, it has been unsatisfactory and ridden with challenges and worrying trends.

Civilians, especially women and children, feel the full force of armed conflicts. Reality shows that often they are deliberately targeted by parties to armed conflict, illegal armed groups or terrorist organizations. We are extremely concerned about the direct and indirect attacks against civilians, civilian infrastructure, journalists and humanitarian and medical personnel. Horrendous methods of warfare, such as sexual and gender-based violence, harassment, rape, terror, starvation, torture and denial of much-needed humanitarian assistance, have found foothold in various armed conflicts and often go unpunished.

An area that needs our special focus is the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence during conflict. A robust implementation of the women and peace and security agenda is crucial and must be carried out. Latvia is convinced that women's participation in peace and security processes is crucial and can improve outcomes before, during and after conflict.

Gender-equality issues and the empowerment of women are Latvia's long-standing priorities in the multilateral fora. As a member of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and various groups of friends — the Group of Friends to eliminate Violence against Women and Girls and the Group of Friends on Women, Peace and Security — we are committed to advancing towards a more equal and safer world. This March, during the sixty-fifth session of the Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Latvia, together with Canada, Liberia, the Maldives and Norway, held an online panel discussion on the "Role of Women Leaders: How to increase Women's Participation in the Military and Peacekeeping?" The discussion was Latvia's initiative, as we have a considerable representation of women in senior political and military positions.

We note with concern increased attacks on and deaths among health-care workers. Five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), and in the light of the current pandemic, we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that medical workers and facilities are not subject to attack. Similarly, we need to strengthen our efforts to protect humanitarian workers from attacks and safeguard humanitarian space.

The pandemic has exacerbated existing threats and affected peacekeepers' operating environment, demanding operational adjustments to ensure the safety and health of peacekeepers and the people they protect. The human rights component of United Nations peacekeeping and the obligation to promote accountability remain essential elements to prevent and mitigate conflict. Those fundamental pillars can be further strengthened by implementation of the Kigali Principles on the Protection

of Civilians and the Action for Peacekeeping” initiative. Latvia will continue to support United Nations peacekeeping efforts by contributing experts to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

It is of the utmost importance that we keep fighting against impunity and work tirelessly to reverse the aforementioned appalling trends and ensure respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. The ratification and full implementation of all important international humanitarian law instruments, such as the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Statute, is crucial. We reconfirm our strong support to international justice and accountability mechanisms.

It is States that bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations. According to the Secretary-General’s report, 2020 was yet another year of civilian suffering. Combined with the effects of global pandemic, civilians continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflicts and suffer devastating consequences. Thousands of civilians were killed or injured, including in Syria, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Libya, Mozambique, Somalia and Ukraine. We need to swiftly address those situations, act promptly and demand accountability.

Furthermore, protection of civilians in armed conflict is an integral part of the Security Council agenda. Prevention of conflicts, existing challenges to the protection of civilians in different conflict-affected areas, as well as accountability for violations against civilians are matters that should be addressed by the Council with a sense of urgency.

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

The recent escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has once again threatened the lives of many innocent people on both sides, leading to a high number of deaths and injuries among civilians, including many children and women. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians or the disproportionate use of force endangering civilians is not acceptable. This also applies to endangering humanitarian workers, first responders, medics, media representatives and journalists. All parties to the conflict bear responsibility for protecting civilians and respecting international humanitarian law.

The escalation of hostilities and allegations of mass killings, sexual and gender-based violence, abductions and forced displacements in Ethiopia’s Tigray region remain highly alarming.

We welcome the decision adopted by the twenty-fifth Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to suspend the voting rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic. We consider it an appropriate response by the Conference to the violation of the core principles of the Convention, more than seven years after the adoption of the resolution 2118 (2013). We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as substantiated through investigations carried out by the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The use of chemical weapons by anyone is a brutal violation of international law, and those responsible for these terrible crimes must be held accountable.

Libya remains a matter of great concern. The large numbers of foreign fighters still present throughout the country and the high mobility of mercenaries in the area, in combination with porous borders, result in the continuous compromised security of civilians and regional destabilization. Those factors need to be addressed to ensure that the cycle of violence is not perpetuated in Libya and its neighbouring States. We strongly condemn all attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. We call on all actors to fully implement the United Nations sanctioned arms embargo and their commitments, in line with the Berlin Process. We urge all political actors to strive towards agreement on a road map for ending foreign military presence on Libyan soil, as well as to prepare the country for elections at the end of 2021.

In addition to other unprecedented challenges, States face growing liabilities in the digital sphere. Digital technologies can and should provide us with means for everyday communication and sources of reliable information. Regardless, the Secretary-General's report recognizes, in cyberspace, countless hidden vulnerabilities and risks of media becoming a tool for manipulation, recruitment and the spread of violence. It is alarming to read about the troubling rise in cyberattacks against critical infrastructure, including health-care facilities. Those attacks not only disrupt critical civilian infrastructure but can have devastating immediate and longer-term effects on civilians, and should therefore not be disregarded by the international community.

It is also essential to counter intolerance, hate speech and the dangerous spread of misinformation. It is the responsibility of States to provide orderly cyberspace based on international law and building digital literacy and resilience to protect its population. Media and information literacy is one of the tools to respond to the increased spread of misinformation and disinformation, including in the context of the coronavirus disease. Latvia has contributed to strengthening the role of the United Nations in dealing with this growing challenge. To that end, we recall the General Assembly resolution on Global Media and Information Literacy Week (A/RES75/267), adopted unanimously by the General Assembly and supported by almost 100 United Nations Member States.

We cannot become detached from human suffering and calls for help. The international community must step up its commitment to provide more robust protection to civilians and implement the comprehensive recommendations of the Secretary-General's report. The vaccine against the coronavirus disease should be universally considered a global public good, and we should strongly advocate for equity and access to vaccines for all.

It is our obligation and common interest to promote and ensure the effective protection of civilians. That requires effective collective efforts. The international community, including the Security Council, has to remain firm and persistent in that endeavour.

Annex 39**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations, Christian Wenaweser**

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing the yearly open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The high relevance of this topic reflects the extent to which the international community fails to protect the most vulnerable from harm during armed conflict, despite numerous obligations and commitments to the contrary. The world continues to witness routine and systematic violations of the fundamental principles of the protection of civilians, as contained in international humanitarian law, with military attacks carried out without due consideration of the obligation to ensure their necessity, proportionality and distinction.

In only a few days we will mark the sixth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration — a political commitment to protect students, teachers and educational facilities from the worst effects of armed conflict. Liechtenstein is a proud signatory to the Declaration and continues to be fully committed to its principles. The current global situation tragically illustrates its high importance. Schools continue to be deliberately targeted and used for military purposes, thereby eroding their sanctity as safe spaces and exposing schools, teachers and students to harm. Such attacks gravely violate the human right to education and can constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. Depriving children access to education has a devastating long-term impact on sustainable development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 4, and irreparably harms children, families, communities and societies.

Liechtenstein is particularly concerned about the scale, severity and recurrence of violations and abuses endured by children in Yemen. Starvation is used as a weapon of war, in blatant violation of international law, thus gravely affecting children and other particularly vulnerable populations. It is of the utmost urgency that all parties to the conflict immediately end and prevent all violations of international law, including attacks on schools, comply with all their obligations under international law and provide immediate and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to all those in need.

Widespread sexual violence continues to be a blight on the lives of countless civilians in armed conflicts, with extremely deep and long-lasting consequences on the affected societies. In that regard, Liechtenstein is alarmed by reports emerging from the Tigray region of Ethiopia of the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war in what appears to be an environment of complete impunity. Among the many victims are girls as young as eight. There must be accountability for the perpetrators of these crimes. If there is an unwillingness or inability to provide justice at the national level, the responsibility to ensure accountability lies with the international community. Reports on rape and other forms of sexual violence are even more concerning in the light of the fact that these crimes are often underreported. Stigmatization and cultural taboos continue to be strongly associated with all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and are particularly strong when such crimes are perpetrated against men and boys. A culture of silence continues to impede accountability and justice and contributes to further cycles of violence and persistent harmful gender stereotypes. In response, the Council must do more to implement resolution 2467 (2019), in particular its survivor-centred approach, and in doing so should benefit from the important work done with civil society actors, such as the All Survivors Project.

Today Syria is in the midst of an enormous humanitarian crisis, potentially its deadliest yet — 60 per cent of all Syrians are food insecure, children are hungrier than ever and the health-care institutions, and medical personnel are under constant

attack. The Syrian Government has systematically attacked medical facilities over 400 times since the beginning of the war. At the same time, humanitarian access continues to be used as a political tool, including by members of the Security Council. For many years, Syrian Government forces have destroyed vital humanitarian aid supplies intended for its own people, including as recently as March in an air strike on a warehouse supported by a non-governmental organization. In this context, the ongoing threat to end the mandate for the final border crossing at Bab Al-Hawa seriously jeopardizes the survival of 2.8 million civilians in need in the north-west of Syria. This is one of many instances, albeit a particularly blatant one, of how the constant threat and use of the veto prevents the Security Council from taking vital action. It is also a grave violation of the Code of Conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, which enshrines the expectation of 122 States for the Council to do better in precisely those situations. If the Security Council does not take its responsibility seriously, we must be ready to use all available tools of the General Assembly to support the Syrian people.

In conclusion, Liechtenstein underlines the strong preventive dimension of the protection-of-civilians agenda. In Myanmar, an unaccountable military elite with a long history of attacking its own civilian population continues to violently trample on peaceful dissent, adding a new bloody chapter to its long history of brutal oppression and threatening regional stability. Time and again the international community has failed to live up to its responsibility to hold to account those who are guilty of grave violations of international humanitarian law. We must draw the right lessons from that failure, in particular for the sake of the people of Myanmar, and pursue justice in the face of atrocity crimes.

Annex 40**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations**

Malta thanks the Chinese presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and the briefers for their insightful briefings and for the critical work the entities they represent carry out in a multitude of difficult scenarios.

Malta fully aligns itself with the statement submitted by the European Union (annex 31) and would like to add a few additional remarks in its national capacity.

Protecting the life and dignity of human beings must be a primary focus of the Security Council. Yet, as articulated in the latest report by the Secretary-General (S/2021/423), the risks faced by civilians in armed conflicts are increasing. Several factors give rise to this, including the increased urbanization of warfare coupled with the use of specific weaponry, the greater prevalence of conflict-induced food insecurity, and the continued targeting of civilian infrastructure. Civilian suffering is further exacerbated by the overlap between conflict and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has the ongoing potential to overwhelm health-care systems.

The results are chilling, with civilians suffering the most from military operations in 2020. Realizing this fact lends even more urgency for all parties to commit to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a call that Malta has long echoed and supported.

To protect civilians most effectively, the international community's foremost priority should be the prevention of hostilities. In this vein, Malta reiterates its belief that the humanitarian-development-peace nexus provides the most appropriate avenue to preventing hostilities, in part due to its ability to move beyond short-term interventions and towards long-term development, thereby promoting durable solutions that address the root causes of conflicts in vulnerable communities.

When such preventive efforts are not successful, let us recall the essential framework provided by international humanitarian law in safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of innocent civilians in times of armed conflict. The full implementation of international humanitarian law by all parties to a conflict is essential to advancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Too often are we seeing the civilian population and civilian infrastructure being directly targeted in contravention of international legal obligations. Where entities fail in fulfilling these obligations, it is equally important to advance accountability efforts and combat impunity.

The Security Council has a crucial role to play in furthering the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict. First, the Council should continue to utilize its voice in all circumstances in calling for compliance with international law and for accountability where such compliance is lacking. Malta commits to promoting such an approach should it be entrusted with the responsibility to serve as a member of the Security Council for the 2023-2024 term. On a more practical level, the Council can also consider mainstreaming the protection-of-civilians-in-armed-conflict agenda in country resolutions and peacekeeping-mission mandates.

In the context of a global pandemic, let us also highlight the enduring relevance of resolutions 2286 (2016) and 2573 (2021), both of which Malta co-sponsored, in part because of their emphasis on the need for parties to abide by the protections afforded by international law to medical facilities and personnel. We similarly commend the emphasis that resolution 2573 (2021) places on the need for parties to facilitate the unhindered delivery and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in areas of armed conflict. We also reiterate Malta's belief that the vaccine should be considered a global public good. Adherence to such principles would prevent and alleviate the suffering of civilians, including from COVID-19, where conflict persists.

Annex 41**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun**

I thank Ambassador Zhang Jun of China and his team for timely convening today's important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

This year marks the twenty-second anniversary of the Security Council's inclusion of the protection of civilians in its agenda, thereby formally recognizing the protection of civilians as matter of international peace and security. I thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2021/423). I also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their briefings (annexes 1 and 2, respectively).

Protecting civilians must always be a top priority under every circumstance, not only in armed conflicts. When assessing the state of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, we cannot deny the fact that there is still great cause for concern. While reiterating the importance of protecting civilian populations and infrastructures, humanitarian and health workers, medical facilities, including hospitals and other public facilities, as well as schools and religious places continue to come under attack. The Security Council has set up the framework to protect civilians in armed conflicts. We all appreciate these efforts. However, millions of people around the world, including some in Myanmar, are still suffering from armed conflicts. Some become the victims of the conflicts. Those who are lucky and escape from the conflicts have to leave their homes and become displaced persons.

Taking this opportunity, I wish to apprise the Council of the current unfolding situation in Myanmar. Since the military coup on 1 February 2021, the armed conflict in the country has intensified, and a murderous military has engaged in a violent crackdown against the peaceful protest movement, targeting civilians in a widespread and systematic manner.

Over a hundred days, the military has used unnecessary, disproportionate and lethal force to suppress demonstrations and a civil-disobedience movement, killing more than 800 individuals, at least 53 of whom are children, while more than 5,000 have been arbitrarily arrested and are still being detained. The escalation of conflict in Kayin, Kayah, Kachin, Chin and Northern Shan states has further intensified. The military air strikes on the civilian areas have caused death, injury or internal displacement for many people, some of whom have even taken refuge in such neighbouring countries as India and Thailand. The recent attacks in Kayah and Chin are terrifying.

There has been widespread violence against humanitarian and medical workers and public facilities. According to the 7 May report of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, medical professionals and health-care workers at the forefront of the nationwide civil disobedience movement are being systematically targeted by the military with killings, beatings, torture, abductions and enforced disappearances. As of the first half of May, there have been at least 158 reported attacks on medical facilities, health personnel and supplies in Myanmar. The military coup has endangered not only vital health services but also the response to the coronavirus disease pandemic.

In the wake of the military coup, as we all have witnessed, the past three months have been both heartbreaking and terrifying for Myanmar civilians. The brutal repression and continued escalation of violence is placing Myanmar on the brink of State collapse.

We all see that the Security Council has been calling for all States to develop national frameworks to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict and ensure accountability to prevent violations of international law. But sadly, what we all are witnessing right now in Myanmar is the military's brutal and systematic attacks against its own people using deadly weapons. There is no sign of a change of course or de-escalation of violence. The safety and security of civilians in Myanmar is seriously endangered and threatened. We have been calling for urgently needed help from the international community, including the Council, which has the core responsibility for ensuring peace and security and the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. But no constructive or decisive action or measure has yet been taken.

Since early May, there has been fighting between the military and the People's Defense Force in the town of Mindat, which was formed for self-defence in response to increasing military violence against civilians. Recently on 15 May, the military launched a coordinated attack against Mindat, indiscriminately deployed heavy weaponry by land and air, perpetrated the widespread use of forced labour and human shields and obstructed the delivery of basic humanitarian necessities for civilians, including food, water and access to medical care and supplies. Many of the people living in Mindat have had to leave their homes owing to the military air attacks.

There have been reports of a dire need for immediate medical aid in Mindat and the military has arrested health-care workers who volunteered to provide medical assistance to the injured. Those actions constitute violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law — plain and simple. Similar attacks have been taking place in parts of Kayah state. Assistance and action from the international community are urgently needed now for Chin and Kayah states.

The protection of civilians is extremely important in the difficult situation that we are facing right now in Myanmar. Civilians in Myanmar are suffering disproportionately from the war initiated by the military, which does not uphold the fundamental principle of humanity. The abduction of civilians continues across the country and people continue to be unwaveringly opposed to the military rule established after the coup more than 100 days ago. The Council can and should do more to protect civilians in Myanmar.

Adhering to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the international community, in particular the Security Council, must take effective collective measures, including imposing sanctions against the military and declaring no-fly zones in the relevant areas in Myanmar, in accordance with the precept of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and must subsequently prevent potential crimes against humanity in Myanmar. The situation in Myanmar can be addressed only by the international community in a coordinated, decisive and timely manner. In order to save the lives of innocent civilians, including young people, and to protect the people from the continued atrocities committed by the military, the international community and the Security Council must act without further delay.

Annex 42**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, Amrit Bahadur Rai**

I would like to begin by thanking the presidency of the People's Republic of China for convening today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The safety and security of civilians have been jeopardized in the countries and regions caught up in armed conflict. The indiscriminate use of methods of warfare and technologies is increasing without respite and civilians continue to be victimized.

Conflicts today are multidimensional and have impacts on civilians, infrastructure, health-care system, livelihoods and education, among others. Women, girls and children continue to face the impacts of conflict disproportionately. Poverty, the consequences of climate change, natural disasters and health emergencies such as the coronavirus disease pandemic have compounded the suffering of already-vulnerable civilians in conflict-affected countries.

As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423) notes, more than 90 per cent of casualties in conflict-ridden countries are civilians and more than 40 per cent of those killed or injured are women and children. Countless numbers of people have been forcibly disappeared, internally displaced or compelled to seek refuge far from their homelands. Furthermore, businesses, schools, religious sites and cultural monuments have been subjected to attacks, which ultimately has a bearing on civilians' safety and security.

The present reality calls for the international community's integrated approach to protecting civilians in armed conflicts.

Nepal has always been supportive of the United Nations normative framework aimed at safeguarding and protecting civilians in armed conflict. We strongly condemn the indiscriminate attack on civilians and their property by parties in conflict. Such attacks must stop immediately. We believe that the protection of civilians is first and foremost the responsibility of host countries. Perpetrators of indiscriminate attacks on civilians should be held accountable under the law. International humanitarian law and its norms should be strongly implemented. Impunity must end and justice must prevail.

At the same time, the protection of civilians is a daunting task and in fact the essence of peacekeeping. It must be the central pillar of the mandate. Peacekeeping missions mandated to protect civilians must adopt a whole-of-mission approach. They must be adequately resourced, including with the latest technologies. Lessons learned and best practices from the past must be upheld, shared widely and formulated within the normative framework.

Nepal's own experience of a nationally led peace process demonstrates the significance of promoting social harmony, tolerance and understanding to ensure civilian protection. Investing in education, awareness-raising programmes and generating employment are critical to support civilians in the long run. Inclusive policies under the State architecture help prevent and mend the causes of conflicts.

As one of the largest troop- and police-contributing countries, Nepal undertakes every possible measure to train its peacekeepers on the protection of civilians. We believe that the troops on the ground should be well versed in the concept of that responsibility and in its execution at the tactical level. We have put in place a thorough vetting process, dedicated predeployment, in-theatre awareness

training and robust punitive measures for those convicted of human rights violations or sexual exploitation and abuse.

In conclusion, constant dialogue and experience-sharing would be helpful in addressing the core of the issue. As a country emerging from a successful homegrown peace process, Nepal stands ready to share its experience and lessons learned in the protection of civilians and post-conflict social reintegration.

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

We would like to thank China for organizing today's open debate in the Security Council.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statements made by the observer of the European Union (annex 31) and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians (annex 54). We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the other speakers for their statements at this open debate.

For 22 years, the protection of civilians in armed conflict has featured on the agenda of the Security Council, beginning with the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which the Kingdom of the Netherlands voted in favour of as a member of the Security Council at that time. It was then, as it is now, our conviction that civilians around the world need to be protected from the devastating consequences of armed conflict.

With regard to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the protection of civilians, the words of the Secretary-General at last year's open debate on the protection of civilians are as valid today as they were a year ago:

“Where armed conflict continues, COVID-19 makes the protection of civilians more challenging than ever, and our support more important than ever.” (*S/2020/465, annex 1*)

We express our great appreciation for all aid workers, who risk their lives to provide assistance to people in need. We also emphasize that the pandemic disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, such as women, children, refugees, internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities. The Kingdom of the Netherlands therefore strongly supports resolution 2565 (2021), which demands that all parties involved in armed conflict engage in a durable humanitarian pause to facilitate humanitarian assistance, as well as the equitable, safe and unhindered delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccination in areas of armed conflict.

With regard to international law and accountability, adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law remains a fundamental priority of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It is the responsibility of all States to end impunity and prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law. Pushing for accountability can help break cycles of violence and continuous action is needed to ensure that we, the international community, are as effective as possible. Cooperation with the International Criminal Court and support for accountability mechanisms, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, are imperative in that regard.

We welcome the recently adopted resolution 2573 (2021), which seeks to ensure full respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law to protect civilians in armed conflict. The resolution also encourages all efforts to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and infrastructure, which is critical to enable the delivery of essential services in armed conflict.

Special attention should be paid to the protection of civilians suffering conflict-induced hunger. Conflict is at the heart of the historic level of food insecurity that the *Global Humanitarian Overview* projects for 2021. The situations in Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Ethiopia are of particular concern. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has long been a prominent advocate for addressing the link between conflict and hunger, resulting among other things in the unanimous adoption of the milestone resolution 2417 (2018). The amendment to the Rome Statute, extending the application of starvation as a war crime to non-international armed conflicts, was another milestone whereby the international community made clear that deliberate starvation is unacceptable and — what is more — punishable. On the third anniversary of resolution 2417 (2018), the Kingdom of the Netherlands remains steadfast in its commitment to hold to account those who use deliberate starvation as a weapon.

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) in 1999, progress has been made, but the annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2021/423) reminds us that significant work remains to be done. Among other things, the report states that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 8,820 civilian casualties in 2020, of whom 30 per cent were children.

Also with regard to Afghanistan, on Saturday, 8 May, schoolgirls were attacked at the Sayed Ul-Shuhada school in Dasht-e-Barchi in west Kabul. As a result of the attack, which targeted Hazaras, more than 50 people died and more than 150 people were injured. The attack and similar ongoing acts of violence in Afghanistan are deeply shocking. Attacks against schoolchildren are attacks against the future of Afghanistan.

Those injustices must be addressed. All victims of the conflict must be listened to and their needs and grievances addressed. Victim-centred justice is essential for lasting peace in Afghanistan. In that regard, we would like to express our appreciation for the ongoing efforts of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Concerning United Nations peacekeeping, in line with the first resolution adopted on the protection of civilians (resolution 1265 (1999)), in the same year the Security Council included a protection-of-civilians component in a United Nations peacekeeping mandate for the first time — namely in the mandate for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. Today a protection-of-civilians component in mission-mandates is the norm. Peacekeeping missions are crucial for the protection of civilians and what is needed is an integrated, coordinated and comprehensive approach to effectively implement the Security Council-mandated protection tasks. Increased effort is required to achieve joint planning, analysis and action among uniformed and civilian mission components.

In order to strengthen peacekeeping and make operations more effective, the Secretary-General launched the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative in 2018. As an A4P champion on protection, the Kingdom of the Netherlands together with Pakistan will co-organize a preparatory conference in October in advance of the peacekeeping ministerial conference to be held in the Republic of South Korea in December.

In that respect, the Netherlands also welcomes the presentation by the Secretary-General of A4P+, which, by concentrating on a few systemic priorities such as operational integration, could significantly contribute to the improved protection of civilians in peacekeeping settings.

As an endorser of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, the Kingdom of the Netherlands remains fully committed to translating those

important guidelines into practice. In line with those principles, we affirm the critical importance of integrated, context-specific and scenario-based training and predeployment training for United Nations peacekeepers.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands reiterates the ongoing importance of international efforts to protect civilians, especially during the global health crisis. The report of the Secretary General reminds us once again that the protection of civilians is a collective responsibility that requires ongoing effort and attention.

Annex 44**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, Munir Akram**

We thank the Permanent Mission of China for holding this important videoconference high-level open debate of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

We also thank the Secretary General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator for their insightful briefings.

The latest report of the Secretary General (S/2021/423) provides useful insight into the entire range of issues related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire last year, the state of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts across the globe remains grave.

The Geneva Conventions — the basic edifice of international humanitarian law — were adopted seven decades ago in the aftermath of the Second World War. With the terrible atrocities of the war fresh in mind, the international community agreed to a set of fundamental principles aimed at strengthening protections for civilians affected by armed conflicts.

Unfortunately, the Geneva Conventions, which contain the most important rules limiting the barbarity of war, do not appear to be limiting very much today.

It is the persistent failure to comply with the basic obligations under the Geneva Conventions and respect the rules of international humanitarian law during armed conflict that presents the central challenge to protecting civilians in current armed conflicts, even as the weapons of destruction have become more lethal and diverse.

Today, as conventional war among States has become unacceptably destructive, most conflicts are irregular and are fought among or with non-State actors. Many such non-State actors are categorized as terrorists. Terrorists, almost by definition, target civilian populations to spread terror. When States also target civilians, their acts must also be categorized as terrorism. Steps are urgently needed to safeguard civilians in such conflicts and hold those responsible for violence against civilians accountable for their crimes. Unfortunately, neither the resolutions of the Security Council nor the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy provides a credible means for offering either protection or justice to civilian victims of terrorism or State terrorism.

Pakistan has been a principal victim of externally sponsored terrorism. We have lost almost 80,000 civilians and security forces in the fight against terrorism. We have conducted well-planned campaigns to root out terrorists operating from our soil. Yet we continue to face cross-border terrorism sponsored by our adversaries.

While the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy contains in its fourth pillar the promise of protecting human rights while fighting terrorism, its enforcement has not been applied effectively or equitably so far.

Counter-terrorism measures do not justify setting aside the limitations of Articles 2 (4) and 51 of the Charter of the United Nations on the non-use of force. The Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism do not authorize the use of force on the territory of other States without the Council's express authorization, neither do they justify compromising the requirement for proportionality in the use of force.

Some counter-terrorism measures are akin to using a hammer to kill a fly. Aerial bombardment usually amounts to the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force, which mostly kills more civilians than terrorists.

There should be accountability for civilian casualties that result from so-called collateral damage by such indiscriminate use of force. The thousands who have died because of unilateral foreign military attacks, including in the Middle East, deserve accountability.

Another principle that has been severely eroded since the 9/11 terrorist attacks is the legitimate struggle of peoples for self-determination against foreign occupation. That is most evident in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories and occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

As an occupying Power, Israel has no right of self-defence under international law. Its use of force against the occupied and besieged Palestinians is illegal. On the contrary, it is the Palestinian people who have the right to struggle by all means possible to secure freedom from foreign occupation.

The false equivalence between the occupier and the occupied is morally and legally untenable. It is such a false equivalence that has given Israel the sense of impunity to use indiscriminate and disproportionate force, including the aerial bombing of Gaza, resulting in the death of more than 200 Palestinians, among whom were dozens of women and children. Such attacks amount to the collective punishment of civilians and constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions. There should be no impunity for such violations.

India's illegal and unilateral actions since 5 August 2019 to impose what its leaders have themselves called a final solution for India-occupied Jammu and Kashmir also constitute grave violations of Security Council resolutions and international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions.

Those actions include the so-called cordon and search operations and fake encounters to extrajudicially kill innocent Kashmiri youth; the indiscriminate use of live ammunition against peaceful protesters, including pellet guns, which have blinded hundreds of Kashmiri children; collective punishments that have destroyed and burned entire Kashmiri neighbourhoods and villages; the arbitrary detention of Kashmiri political leaders and thousands of young boys on trumped-up charges; the targeting of civilians in ceasefire violations along the Line of Control in Kashmir; and the forcible seizure of Kashmiri land and efforts to change the demography of occupied Jammu and Kashmir in order to transform it from a Muslim-majority state to a Hindu-majority territory.

Those responsible for such grave and consistent breaches of human rights law and international humanitarian laws in the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir must be held accountable and brought to justice.

The challenge of addressing gross violations of international humanitarian law is further exacerbated by the inequity and double standards of the international response. In some situations, there are quick and robust calls for accountability. In other situations, the perpetrators enjoy virtual impunity to commit crimes. The recent records of the Security Council itself illustrate such double standards.

In the current circumstances, it is vital to reinforce the concept of the protection of civilians and accountability in all situations of armed conflict, including in Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir.

The goal of the protection of civilians is best served by preventing the outbreak of an armed conflict in the first place.

The Security Council, the organ of the United Nations with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, should address the root causes of emerging and long-standing conflicts, including those in Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir, and should promote just and peaceful solutions.

Unless we do so, the human suffering and misery — so evident among the world's 60 million refugees and displaced persons and the millions of others caught in the crossfire of conflict — will continue to intensify, threatening international peace and security and the world order.

Annex 45**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Poland to the United Nations**

Let me begin by warmly thanking the delegation of the People's Republic of China for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Our discussion is timely, as it coincides with the fifth anniversary of the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel in armed conflict.

Poland aligns itself with the statements delivered by the European Union (annex 31) and Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (annex 54). Both documents underscore the need to step up the efforts of the international community to address the lack of protection of civilians in situations of conflict, which continue to afflict many parts of the world.

Five years ago, on the day of the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), the Secretary-General pointed out that we must never become numb to glaring violations committed against civilians in times of conflict. Today, when the world seems entirely preoccupied by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we should revisit those words, perhaps now more than ever. Unfortunately, certain problems have not only remained unsolved but in many cases have become even more complicated.

The year 2020 once again demonstrated how violence and instability exacerbate humanitarian challenges. The most recent report by the Secretary General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423) notes that there were 8,820 documented civilian casualties, 30 per cent of whom were children. While that number was 15 per cent lower than in 2019, it remains highly unsettling.

In view of the above, Poland remains fully supportive of the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire last year, as the coronavirus pandemic is still far from over. The virus has not only increased existing inequalities but has also interrupted protection services, including the provision of medical and humanitarian assistance to affected populations.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols of 1977, which have been crystallized in customary international humanitarian law, contain specific rules to protect civilian populations. Unfortunately, those not taking part in the fighting still bear the brunt of armed violence. That must stop immediately. In that regard, Poland emphasizes the importance of ensuring respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law, which remains one of the greatest achievements of the international community in its efforts to reduce the suffering of civilians during armed conflict.

Hardly a day goes by without evidence of another despicable attack on objects indispensable to the survival of civilians in conflict zones. Far too often, those attacks are not just incidents but rather a deliberate tactic of war and terror adopted by combatants. Such gross violations of international humanitarian law are outrageous and intolerable. We hope that resolution 2573 (2021), which was unanimously adopted by the Council last month, will ensure better protection for civilian infrastructure and lead to the establishment of durable humanitarian pauses to facilitate assistance in conflict-affected areas.

I would also like to draw attention to the increasingly evident link between armed conflict and food insecurity. For example, as indicated by the United Nations Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, in central and eastern Tigray, as well as parts of the north-west of that region, "crisis" and "emergency" hunger levels were reported. That means that people are suffering from acute malnutrition. Suffice it to say that before the conflict became aggravated, Tigray was largely free from hunger.

Immediate, full and uninterrupted humanitarian access in situations of conflict is an important prerequisite for effective humanitarian action. Unfortunately, that is far from being the reality given that medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as their equipment and supplies, continue to be targeted by armed and terrorist groups. We strongly condemn those attacks and reiterate our commitment to bringing the perpetrators of such heinous crimes to justice. Let us be clear: without decisive accountability measures, there can be no deterrence of future violations.

In its humanitarian efforts, Poland concentrates on turbulent areas in which humanitarian crises overlap with violence and unstable political situations. Our priority regions are the Middle East, with a particular focus on the Syrian civilian population and hosting communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq; Ukraine; and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Poland cooperates with multilateral partners, especially United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to efficiently address the most pressing and complex issues. Since 2010, Poland has been providing regular payments to the ICRC in response to the crises in Syria, eastern Ukraine, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Haiti. In addition, in September 2018 we signed a memorandum of understanding with the ICRC in the field of humanitarian assistance and international humanitarian law.

Effective protection demands more focus on vulnerable groups, including women, children, youth, persons with disabilities and internally displaced persons, who suffer most from the devastating and disproportionate consequences of armed conflicts. They are often faced with different challenges, such as limited access to health services, severe restrictions to education and unequal employment opportunities, inter alia. They also happen to be the primary victims of land mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. That is why we reiterate the critical need to respect the rights of vulnerable groups and to guarantee them adequate protection and any assistance they may require.

Children are among the first victims of war and violence. Lamentably, with the detrimental consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are at an even greater risk of abuse, abandonment, rejection and recruitment by armed and terrorist forces. That being the case, protecting and reintegrating vulnerable and fragile groups of child refugees, internally displaced children, children traumatized by war and children born of sexual violence remain the major priorities of Polish development cooperation.

Next month, the second anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2475 (2019), which was initiated by Poland and the United Kingdom, will provide a good opportunity to reiterate our commitment to alleviating the suffering of persons with disabilities caught up in conflict. Persons with disabilities face multiple obstacles, including limited access to humanitarian assistance, health-care services, education and psychological support. We must do better in order to make sure that those persons are not discriminated against in any way and that their specific needs are adequately addressed in humanitarian responses.

Poland highlights the importance of adopting integrated, coordinated and comprehensive whole-of-mission approaches to protecting civilians within the framework of peacekeeping operations. There is a clear need to establish protection of civilians coordination mechanisms within mission mandates that involve humanitarian and development actors and host authorities.

Last but not least, let me emphasize that conflict zones are at risk of being excluded from equitable access to vaccinations. Therefore, we must redouble our efforts to counteract the pandemic's disruptive consequences in those areas. That

being said, Poland is proudly supporting and financially contributing to the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility initiative. We are convinced that international solidarity is an absolute must in order to ensure that the vaccine distribution process is fully inclusive and effective.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight that protecting civilians affected by armed conflicts is our moral and collective responsibility. In order to do so effectively, we need more political will and institutional coherence. Poland stands ready to support any initiative within the United Nations framework aimed at achieving that goal.

Annex 46**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations, Nuno Vaultier Mathias**

Portugal aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union (EU) (annex 31) and would like to add the following points in its national capacity.

Portugal thanks the Chinese presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

This is a timely occasion to highlight the need for the development of comprehensive strategies for conflict prevention, namely the promotion of sustainable development policies aimed at consolidating peace and protecting civilians while fully respecting the primacy of political dialogue and international law.

Only with an integrated approach based on peace and security, sustainable development and human rights can we guarantee sustainable peace. As has been broadly demonstrated since the concept was first included in peacekeeping mandates 21 years ago, the protection of civilians must be regarded as a cross-cutting priority throughout the conflict cycle.

One of the fundamental principles of protection of civilians mandates in peacekeeping is that protecting civilians is the primary responsibility of Governments. Peacekeepers with a mandate to protect civilians have the authority and responsibility to provide protection when Governments are unable or unwilling to protect them. Therefore, the protection of civilians is a fundamental pillar of conflict prevention and of peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. It is also significantly connected to the women and peace and security and the children and armed conflict agendas.

Portugal welcomes and encourages the continued attention that the Security Council dedicates to the protection of civilians, which is consistently showcased in several relevant instruments. The adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) was key in establishing the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist threats and enhancing international and regional cooperation. Resolution 2417 (2018) drew attention to the link between armed conflict and conflict-induced food insecurity; called on all parties to conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians; and condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations. Only recently, the adoption of resolution 2573 (2021) brought very welcome attention to objects and infrastructures critical for the delivery of essential services to the civilian population.

Despite the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire in March 2020 to focus on the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), ongoing conflicts continue to harm populations worldwide. In that sense, resolution 2565 (2021) was pivotal in calling for strengthened international cooperation to facilitate equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and during complex humanitarian emergencies.

It is essential to guarantee and reinforce training for all members of peacekeeping operations. That includes training in international humanitarian law for armed forces, which is an obligation under customary international humanitarian law, as well as under the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols. That obligation has repeatedly been recalled by the United Nations in both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

With a view to supporting host Governments in meeting their primary responsibility to protect civilians, it is important to engage in dialogue and political advocacy through support for reconciliation, peace agreements and mediation, as well as in capacity-building and promoting accountability and fighting impunity. It is worth bearing in mind that deliberate attacks against civilians constitute war crimes and in some cases crimes against humanity, which deserve due accountability. Moreover, monitoring and reporting processes are fundamental for decision-making on the ground, enabling more targeted strategies.

Portugal remains committed to the defence of international humanitarian law and humanitarian aid principles and reaffirms the relevance of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which provides a common vision that guides the action of the EU in humanitarian aid. The importance of compliance with international humanitarian law, respecting and safeguarding humanitarian principles, guaranteeing humanitarian access in conflict situations and ensuring the protection of civilians in armed conflict will continue to rank high among Portugal's priorities.

Annex 47**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani**

I thank China for convening this Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their briefings.

The State of Qatar welcomes the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423). We are extremely concerned that armed conflict continues to be characterized by high levels of civilian death, injury and psychological trauma, sexual violence, torture and disappearance, as well as damaged and destroyed homes, schools, markets, hospitals and essential civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, more people were forcibly displaced in mid-2020 than the year before.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to cause enormous human suffering, exacerbating existing inequalities and protection concerns and contributing to increasing humanitarian needs, including famine, food insecurity, lack of access to education and medical shortfalls. Those that are already weakened by years of armed conflict are particularly vulnerable. People with disabilities, families, women and children are disproportionately impacted and experience ever-higher levels of risks.

The State of Qatar strongly supported the appeal of the Secretary-General, António Guterres, on 23 March 2020 for a global ceasefire. We have been at the forefront of global efforts to support the most vulnerable around the world. For instance, to help nations inoculate their most vulnerable populations, the Qatar Red Crescent Society has launched a \$100 million campaign to provide COVID-19 vaccines to refugees, internally displaced people and migrants around the world.

The State of Qatar would like also to bring the attention of the Security Council to the deliberate grave violations committed against educational institutions, resulting in death, destruction and loss of education, creating long-term negative consequences for whole communities.

According to *Education Under Attack 2020*, a report published by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, more than 22,000 students, teachers and academics were injured, killed or harmed in attacks on education during armed conflict or insecurity in the past five years. More than 11,000 separate attacks on education facilities, students and educators were perpetrated between 2015 and 2019.

The past year has seen a rise in attacks on education around the world, both inside and outside situations of conflict. In many regions, armed groups have targeted schools, teachers and students. Attacks have destroyed buildings, caused children to drop out of school and thwarted children's chance to get an education. In addition, schools have been occupied by the police and military and children have been recruited from schools to become soldiers. Moreover, the safety of women and girls and the protection of girls' education in many parts of the world is a growing concern.

Those attacks are also an attack on the future of the countries in question, as education is one of the best tools to achieve peace, stability and sustainable development. Without access to education, a generation of children living in conflict will grow up without the skills they need to contribute to their countries and economies. Member States must take urgent measures to implement Security

Council resolutions and protect the provision of education in situations of armed conflict.

The State of Qatar calls for the protection of all children and youth, as well as accountability for grave violations of international law against children. Sustainable peace requires that parties to conflict address the root causes of the conflict and work to prevent further escalation of violence and bring about justice for children who fall victim to deliberate violence and harm.

We reaffirm the importance of ensuring safe learning environments in humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises. The international community must refocus its efforts on ensuring children's access to quality education in emergencies. Children's futures are threatened by targeted attacks against schools, learners and education personnel, which constitute deliberate and grave violations of international humanitarian law.

In resolution 74/275 of 28 May 2020, which was introduced by the State of Qatar, the General Assembly proclaimed 9 September the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. That landmark resolution depicts the global consensus that all countries bear the responsibility to prevent attacks on education in war and to respond urgently when such attacks occur. It also provides a unique annual opportunity for mobilization to protect education from attack.

The Safe Schools Declaration, an intergovernmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict that is mentioned in resolution 74/275, is a proven tool for protecting education and has contributed to concrete changes in policy and practice over the years.

There is a need to reinforce transparent mechanisms, including at the field level, to track, analyse and publicly report on violations caused by parties to armed conflicts, while making practical recommendations to enhance the protection of civilians and prevent further violations. In that regard, the State of Qatar has prioritized efforts to ensure that timely and verifiable data on attacks on education can be used for accountability purposes, as well as to inform prevention and responses.

We must all come together as one international community to work with determination to build a process for peace founded on legality and justice. We must uphold our commitment to protect civilians in armed conflict, including by promoting and implementing the relevant and applicable legal and policy frameworks. In so doing, we must redouble our efforts to strengthen the implementation of accountability mechanisms.

To conclude, I would like to reaffirm the State of Qatar's commitment to prioritizing protection at all levels.

Annex 48**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Cho Hyun**

I would first like to thank the President of the Security Council for convening today's timely open debate.

Twenty-two years have passed since the protection of civilians in armed conflict was included as an item on the Security Council's agenda in 1999 and we have indeed made much progress. However, as expressly stated in this year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423), civilians still bear the brunt of military conflicts, with the recent situation in Israel and Palestine serving as a grim example. Moreover, the acute suffering caused by the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has been exacerbated by armed conflicts.

Against that backdrop, I would like to highlight the following four points that are of particular importance to my delegation.

First, my delegation welcomes the focus on the protection of medical care in today's debate and calls for the full implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on civilians in conflict situations and to overwhelm health-care systems, it is imperative that all parties to conflict ensure the respect and protection of all medical personnel, transports and facilities, as demanded in resolution 2286 (2016).

We strongly support the Council's call for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in its resolution 2532 (2020), which recognizes that violence and instability can exacerbate the pandemic. Furthermore, resolution 2565 (2021), which demands the facilitation of equitable, safe and unhindered delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations in areas of armed conflict, must be fully implemented. The Republic of Korea, as co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security, is committed to providing its full support in that regard.

Secondly, we must ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Indeed, strengthening accountability and ending impunity is the key to ending violations against innocent civilians in armed conflicts and preventing their recurrence.

In that vein, we emphasize the need to support and strengthen our tools to document and address violations, including United Nations investigation and monitoring mechanisms, and we acknowledge the important role of international tribunals and hybrid courts, which provide complementary avenues to enable accountability. My delegation also takes this opportunity to reaffirm its support for the International Criminal Court.

Thirdly, in our efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict, we cannot emphasize enough the need for an inclusive approach that prioritizes the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, such as women, children and persons with disabilities. As the report of the Secretary-General rightly points out, armed conflicts and the global pandemic have had a disproportionate impact on those populations and we must strengthen our efforts to protect them and ensure that their needs are taken into account in every phase of the peace processes.

Fourthly, noting that peacekeeping remains one of the most effective tools available to the United Nations for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, my delegation strongly supports the role of peacekeeping operations in facilitating a protective environment for the most vulnerable populations. We agree with the finding in the Secretary-General's report that peacekeeping operations continue to

deliver on their mandates to protect civilians and we highly commend the sacrifice and commitment of all peacekeepers. However, we must not take that for granted and provide the adequate support they need.

We emphasize the need to provide peacekeepers with sufficient pre-deployment training for enhanced capabilities on civilian protection, such as gender equality education and strategic communications training at the local level. We should also provide the components of protection of civilians mandates, including women's protection advisers, child protection advisers and human rights teams, with adequate resources. We look forward to furthering our discussions on that important issue at the upcoming peacekeeping ministerial meeting to be held in Seoul in December.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the Republic of Korea's commitment to working with the United Nations and all Member States to better protect civilians in armed conflict.

Annex 49**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Rwanda to the United Nations**

The Republic of Rwanda congratulates the People's Republic of China for organizing today's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We thank the briefers for their insightful presentations. Rwanda attaches great importance to the protection of civilians, which is a crucial component of peacekeeping mandates.

As His Excellency Mr. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, stated in September 2014:

“When lives are at stake, nothing matters more than saving them. Protection of civilians should be the central purpose of peacekeeping. So long as peacekeeping is necessary, it should be timely, focused and effective. By working together, we can reach that point.”

We continue to observe that protection challenges are as pressing as ever in multidimensional missions in Africa. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of people living in ongoing and emerging conflict situations and further complicated protection challenges. As we work towards ending the pandemic, we must ensure that humanitarian and security efforts do not suffer in the face of COVID-19 restrictions and financing shortages. Protection efforts are critically needed in volatile areas and therefore we cannot afford for them to be derailed by the pandemic.

Rwanda knows from experience that the immediate threat to the lives of civilians requires physical deterrence. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda could have been prevented if the United Nations had acted upon the credible information and reports received from the Field Force Commander.

Rwanda's commitment to peacekeeping is informed by our strong belief in our common humanity and the dignity of all people.

Rwanda wishes to offer the following recommendations.

First, in conflict situations requiring peace enforcement interventions, instead of peacekeeping the United Nations needs to acknowledge that peacekeepers are not mandated to address such situations and should therefore work closely with and in support of regional and subregional initiatives towards conflict resolution, including through peace enforcement operations when required.

Secondly, with regard to the performance and accountability of United Nations peacekeepers, the force's mindset, combat training, conduct and discipline, as well as quality equipment, are all essential components. The presence of declared and undeclared caveats in peacekeepers' execution of operational duties is also an important limit on their performance and increases the threat to the safety and security of all peacekeepers operating in the same zone. The United Nations Secretariat should provide members with the exact status of known contingent caveats existing to date.

Thirdly, on the political front Rwanda believes in and welcomes a political approach to conflict resolution and mediation. Indeed, peaceful conflict resolution enables an inclusive process that potentially builds confidence in the fact that sustainable peace is within reach. In the broadest meaning, it requires relevant State and non-State authorities to adhere to their legal and moral obligations to preserve the lives, physical security and dignity of those under imminent threat.

Fourthly, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) is a key component in negotiating and sustaining ceasefire agreements. We recognize that

the successful disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed groups is key in creating an environment for the protection of civilians in conflict zones. Unfortunately, DDR programmes are not receiving the attention and support required from the Council, despite their evident and central contribution to peacebuilding and lasting peace. We call on all Council members to increase their investment in effective DDR, which is essential in order to provide former combatants with alternative options to war and harming civilians for a living.

Fifthly, the protection of civilians will not be satisfactory or complete without justice and accountability for war crimes. In that vein, perpetrators should be pursued and brought before courts of law. All Member States should fully cooperate in providing justice. Arresting criminals who are recognized by competent international courts should not be politicized or used as a political weapon. Failure to support the justice process and refusal to comply with authorized mechanisms paves the way for similar crimes to be committed in future.

Annex 50**Statement by the Permanent Representative of San Marino to the United Nations, Damiano Belleffi**

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important meeting, and I would also like to thank the briefers for their presentations.

San Marino welcomes the latest report of the Secretary General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2021/423) and supports the measures contained therein.

Regrettably, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has created new challenges all over the world and has further weakened fragile situations and aggravated the conditions of vulnerable groups that were already suffering. As we know, the pandemic is concurrent with ongoing conflicts, exacerbating precarious conditions and inequalities and generating new protection concerns. The global health emergency has amplified the need for humanitarian assistance for civilians in conflict; increased the risk of famine, displacement and food insecurity; and exacerbated medical shortfalls.

Regrettably, we constantly witness the desperation and suffering of civilians living in conflict zones. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts, with an unacceptable number of casualties. We constantly see them being wounded, fleeing from their homes and suffering from the lack of food and the destruction of their houses and vital infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and medical supplies.

Recently, the Parliament of the Republic of San Marino expressed its deep concern about the ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians — conflicts that are creating a destabilizing impact on the lives of civilians. The Republic of San Marino firmly condemns direct and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and urges all parties to adhere to international humanitarian law.

The Republic of San Marino also strongly condemns attacks against humanitarian and medical workers and their facilities and equipment. We urge all parties to stop such vile attacks, which are in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, and we also call on all parties to implement resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of health care in armed conflict.

The pandemic has weakened and exhausted even the most successful health-care systems. Therefore, in areas in which those systems were already in a precarious situation, health care has become an emergency within an emergency. Today health-care systems in areas of conflict have been totally undermined, at a time when they are most needed. Resolution 2286 (2016) remains critical, as does resolution 2565 (2021). It is imperative to ensure the equitable, safe and unhindered delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations in areas of conflict, in post-conflict situations and during complex humanitarian emergencies.

The Republic of San Marino reiterates its full support for the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire. The ceasefire is absolutely necessary during this emergency, and it is necessary that all parties involved in armed conflicts genuinely engage in a humanitarian pause in order to allow the delivery of medical equipment and COVID-19 vaccines.

The Republic of San Marino is very concerned about the urbanization of armed conflicts. Civilians caught up in urban hostilities suffer from their direct, indirect, visible and invisible consequences. Furthermore, the use of explosive devices causes great harm to civilians in such areas. They are deprived of food, water, electricity,

sanitation and health care, and the situation can only get progressively worse when hostilities are protracted, as is most often the case today, and humanitarian access is denied.

The Republic of San Marino firmly believes that all parties should avoid the use of such devices in populated areas, and we fully support the Secretary-General's call on parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in urban centres. We also support his call to draft a political declaration as a measure to address that threat.

San Marino calls on all parties to implement resolution 2417 (2018), which condemns the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access.

Furthermore, San Marino welcomes recently adopted resolution 2573 (2021), which condemns attacks against critical civilian infrastructure that are indispensable for the civilian population's survival, and we call on all parties to fully comply with their obligation under international humanitarian law.

The Republic of San Marino is deeply concerned about the conditions of vulnerable groups in armed conflicts. Children, for example, suffer from glaring violations and abuses. Many of them are recruited as soldiers, and those who are not recruited are deprived of their childhood and basic rights, such as education. Often their schools are attacked, destroyed or used as military facilities. San Marino condemns such acts in the strongest possible terms and fully supports the development of action plans to prevent and end grave violations against children.

In that regard, San Marino has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the United Nations ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict campaign — all of which are very important instruments aimed at protecting children in conflict, as well as their rehabilitation and reintegration.

Disabled people caught up in areas affected by conflicts are another concern for San Marino. In such areas, people with disabilities may be unable to flee attacks, abandoned or deprived of their basic needs owing to the disruption of basic services. Women and girls with disabilities are also particularly at risk of violence and abuse. It is therefore critical to act effectively together for the protection of those specific groups.

Regrettably, on a daily basis, civilians continue to be the victims of direct and indiscriminate attacks, to be killed and targeted and to suffer the devastating consequences thereof, such as being displaced for years or even decades.

Once again, I would like to reiterate the critical importance of international humanitarian law. All parties must strictly abide by its norms, and we need to support measures to ensure accountability for violators.

Political mediation, early-warning mechanisms and concrete policies and practices are also needed for the effective protection of civilians.

Only with the genuine commitment of all parties and stakeholders will we finally be able to safeguard civilians in armed conflict.

Annex 51**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations, Michal Mlynár**

Slovakia aligns itself with the statement submitted by the observer of the European Union (annex 31). I will add several reflections in my national capacity.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423) and note with concern the dire picture it paints. As the coronavirus disease spread across the world, the Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire, which was further endorsed by resolution 2565 (2021) and garnered broad support. Despite global understanding of the gravity of the situation, armed conflicts have continued to deepen vulnerabilities and have exacerbated the impact of the pandemic on its victims.

Throughout 2020, civilians bore the brunt of military operations, and the toll of armed conflicts contributed to the deepening of human suffering. As the most vulnerable groups, children, women, persons with disabilities, journalists and victims of sexual violence were often hit the hardest.

Respect for international law is essential for the protection of civilians, while the full implementation of its norms, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, can significantly contribute to avoiding civilian deaths, suffering and displacement. All parties to armed conflict must abide by their obligations under international law, and we call on them to do so without further delay.

In order to ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law and to comprehensively address its violations and hold perpetrators to account, States must adopt and regularly review national legislation and institutional arrangements. That also includes the elaboration and regular updates of military manuals, rules of engagement and training materials for armed forces, as well as conducting training in the area of international humanitarian law for armed forces and other relevant personnel.

Slovakia strongly supports the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its pivotal role in addressing violations of international humanitarian law by bringing perpetrators to justice and closing the impunity gap. Achieving the universal jurisdiction of the ICC would be a major step towards ensuring accountability for violations of international humanitarian law at the regional and international levels. We therefore urge all United Nations Members that have not yet done so to ratify and fully implement the Rome Statute.

We witness far too often that the actions of the international community fall short of adequately deterring and preventing the commission of atrocity crimes. More needs to be done to address the preventive aspect of the responsibility to protect (R2P) in that regard, in line with the prevention agenda of the Secretary-General. After all, there is overall agreement that prevention is at the core of the responsibility to protect.

Slovakia welcomes the recent adoption of General Assembly resolution 75/277, on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We are convinced that the Security Council and the General Assembly both play an important role in helping reach consensus on R2P and promoting the development of the concept and an understanding by all Member States of their individual and collective responsibility to protect all people from the most heinous crimes.

In addition to the authorization of the use of force to protect civilians, as a unique feature of United Nations peacekeeping, the unarmed approach to the

protection of civilians through dialogue with parties to armed conflicts, training, monitoring and community policing highlight the local ownership of the protection of civilians. We recognize the progress made in the unarmed approach to the protection of civilians in Mali, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

Last but not least, it is important to highlight the role of the security sector. When reformed and well governed, the latter can significantly contribute to the protection of civilians. The security sector plays a key role in preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflicts. Slovakia is a long-standing supporter of the reform of the security sector and is proud to co-chair, together with South Africa, the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform.

It is important to continue the dialogue on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, but most of all the political will to take concrete steps and robust and bold action and globally address the adverse consequences of armed conflicts is an outstanding issue of the utmost importance.

Annex 52**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Mathu Joyini**

We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this annual open debate on the protection of civilians, which is opportune as the Security Council continues to address conflict situations on its agenda during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

South Africa welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423), which underpins the discussions today. We also wish to thank the briefers for their insightful briefings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on new, ongoing and protracted conflicts, exacerbating existing inequalities, vulnerabilities and protection concerns, and it has also contributed to the escalating humanitarian needs, including the displacement of persons, famine, food insecurity and desperate medical shortfalls. Civilians living in conflict zones continue to experience the devastating impacts of conflict-related violence.

We concur with the Secretary-General's assessment in his report that it is vital that urgent measures be taken to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are also made available to those in conflict situations. Civilians, internally displaced persons, refugees, migrants and people with disabilities are particularly at risk of exclusion from national vaccine programmes in conflict areas. We reiterate our call for ensuring timely and equitable universal access to COVID-19 vaccines for all populations, which is crucial for preventing the spread of the pandemic and the realization of a post-pandemic world. In that regard, we welcome the announcements by some countries in support of waivers to international property rights in order to expedite the global response to the pandemic and accelerate the production and distribution of affordable vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics.

During armed conflict, civilians often experience harsh realities. They face daily threats of violence and death, as they find themselves inadvertently caught up in the middle of conflict. Despite being protected under international humanitarian law, civilians, including the most vulnerable — children, women, refugees, displaced and disabled persons, as well as humanitarian and medical personnel — continue to be directly, deliberately, systematically and violently targeted by armed forces.

Similarly, access to humanitarian assistance is being compromised by the continued destruction of hospitals and attacks on medical transport and essential services. Objects indispensable to civilian populations must be protected at all costs, and the recently adopted resolution 2573 (2021), on attacks against civilian infrastructure, should be implemented stringently in order to uphold international humanitarian law.

The protection of civilians during armed conflict is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. Equally, we remain concerned about the continued lack of safety and protection for humanitarian workers. The politicization of humanitarian corridors in Gaza, northern Syria and Yemen continues to have detrimental effects on civilians who are in the greatest need of humanitarian aid. Despite such challenges, humanitarian personnel continue to carry out their work with bravery and provide assistance to vulnerable communities. South Africa underlines the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians and humanitarian personnel within their borders. In that regard, we reiterate our call on all parties to armed conflict — State and non-State actors alike — to comply with the obligations applicable to them under international humanitarian law and take the required steps to protect civilians.

It is regrettable that the plight of civilians in protracted conflicts, such as Palestine and Western Sahara, does not seem to receive adequate attention and that accountability for violations against civilians in those territories is lacking. The continuation of the bombardment of innocent civilians in Palestine, including through attacks on women, children and civilian infrastructure such as health-care and education facilities, is alarming. The people of Palestine have suffered grave breaches of international humanitarian law, while Israel, the occupying Power, continues to act with absolute impunity, in contempt of the law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

It is important for the Security Council and Member States to take urgent and practical steps to respond to the challenges that remain in protecting civilians in armed conflict. We wish to highlight several areas in which the Security Council could assist in protecting civilians caught in armed conflict.

First, the Security Council and Member States should continue to support non-violent and community-based protection mechanisms, where possible, such as political mediation, early-warning activities and unarmed civilian protection. The effective protection of civilians begins with safe and inclusive dialogue among conflict-affected communities, States and other stakeholders at all levels. Grass-roots peacemaking efforts, including those led by women and young people, should also be promoted.

Secondly, the Security Council and States must fulfil their commitment to the full protection of civilians, including by promoting and implementing the relevant and applicable legal and policy frameworks. It is important that efforts be made to ensure accountability for violations, including by condemning those who violate international humanitarian law. We believe that accountability mechanisms at the domestic level are essential. Broader regional and international mechanisms should continue to support them, based on the principles of complementarity and subsidiarity.

Finally, although host States have the primary responsibility to protect their civilians, we commend the continued efforts of United Nations peacekeeping operations, where mandated, in protecting civilians and promoting and protecting human rights in situations of armed conflict. We believe that more remains to be done to strengthen the role of peacekeeping, particularly in protecting women and children, as well as other vulnerable groups, against grave violations, in line with the objectives of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative. We reiterate the need to establish clearly defined, context-specific, adequately resourced and realistic peacekeeping mandates in order for peacekeeping operations to deliver effectively on those mandates, including with respect to the protection of civilians.

In conclusion, the international community must shore up the political will and courage to act immediately and without selectivity to protect human lives and to peacefully and justly resolve the emerging and outstanding conflicts plaguing our world.

Annex 53**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations**

I am pleased to submit this statement on behalf of the co-penholders on resolution 2286 (2016) — Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Uruguay and my own country, Spain.

At the outset, the co-penholders wish to express their grave concern at the increased number of attacks on medical personnel, transport and facilities in conflicts around the world. They deprive communities of health care in the most challenging circumstances, while the victims of attacks accordingly suffer increased vulnerabilities.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in conflict-affected countries is overstressing their health-care systems, causing further suffering and posing a threat to the lives of civilians. The ability to control the virus, treat infected patients and sustain essential life-saving health services is severely constrained.

It is shocking to read that attacks against health care in conflict situations, including cyberattacks, have only increased during the past year during the pandemic. We must condemn such attacks in the strongest terms. We must together stop the dramatic trend of increasing attacks. We must advocate better for the observance of international humanitarian law and resolution 2286 (2016).

The co-penholders reiterate their full support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire and urge parties to armed conflict to respect it and allow safe, rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian and medical workers, as well as the safe distribution of vaccines to communities in situations of armed conflict and complex humanitarian emergencies, consistent with international law, including international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

We consider that there is an increased need for improved measures related to the collection of data on attacks against health care in conflict situations, which could enable better analysis of their trends and impacts and the adoption of appropriate policies and measures.

Finally, the co-penholders request that the Security Council continue to follow closely the implementation of, and compliance with, resolution 2286 (2016), and also that the Secretary-General ensure that future annual reports on the protection of civilians reflect that crucial issue.

Annex 54**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations**

[Original: English and French]

I am honoured to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict — Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, the Dominican Republic, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Côte d'Ivoire, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Uruguay and Switzerland.

We thank the People's Republic of China for organizing this important open debate in the light of the appalling global state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as described in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423). Almost 90 per cent of casualties in urban warfare are civilians. Indiscriminate and direct attacks on civilians are occurring with horrifying frequency. Sexual- and gender-based violence persists, often as part of a broader strategy. The strict application of the rules and principles of international humanitarian law, including those of humanity, necessity, distinction, proportionality and military precaution in attack, are required by all parties to armed conflict.

The Group of Friends remains concerned about the humanitarian harm caused during active hostilities in populated areas, including the harm caused by explosive weapons. It emphasizes that only full respect for international humanitarian law, human rights law and the reduction of violence can protect the civilian population. Overall, the Security Council has a crucial role to play in that regard, and the Group of Friends echoes its constant calls for compliance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the political settlement of armed conflicts.

The failure to protect civilians in armed conflict continues to dramatically impact the purposes of the Organization across its three pillars. More consistency and political will on the part of both Member States and parties to armed conflict are needed to better protect civilians. The Group of Friends is committed to doing its part and contributing to advocacy at the global level to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Group of Friends highlights the following points.

First, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on conflict-affected countries and has exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities and risks, with women, girls and vulnerable groups being disproportionately affected. The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a public health issue but also a protection crisis that affects the protection of civilians in conflict and post-conflict situations. In such cases, Member States must ensure that emergency responses to the pandemic respect international law and that all measures undertaken to fight the virus be lawful, necessary and proportionate. Furthermore, such measures must be limited in time, non-discriminatory and assessed on a regular basis in order to ensure that their impact — for instance, on humanitarian access — is not aggravating protection challenges.

We welcome and support the Security Council's demand for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda in order to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The Group underlines that inclusive and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines is essential to ending the pandemic and notes with concern that those affected by conflict and insecurity are particularly at risk of being left behind. We call for safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, without delay, in order to facilitate, inter alia, COVID-19 vaccinations, in line with resolution 2565 (2021).

The pandemic has led to the prolonged absence of 1.5 billion children from school. It is of the utmost importance that those children, especially girls, be reintegrated into the educational system as soon as possible. That specifically concerns conflict-affected areas, in which the educational system was already precarious before the outbreak of COVID-19 and violence against women and children has increased during the pandemic.

Secondly, five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), the Group of Friends reaffirms its unwavering support for that important resolution. As the world continues to confront the pandemic and health-care systems are overwhelmed, the resolution is more relevant than ever. Yet appalling levels of violence against the wounded and sick, against medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties and their means of transport and equipment and against hospitals and other medical facilities persist with devastating consequences. Significant additional efforts are needed to improve the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) and the application of the rules of international law that underpin it.

The Group of Friends urges all Member States and parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. We reiterate the Secretary-General's recommendations to implement good practices in that regard, including the ratification of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. The Group of Friends also emphasizes the fact that malicious cyberoperations on medical facilities, as currently experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot be considered acceptable, either in times of peace or in armed conflict.

The Group of Friends calls on Member States to ensure that counter-terrorism measures not impede humanitarian and medical activities or engagement with all relevant actors, as foreseen by international humanitarian law. Mindful of resolutions 2462 (2019) and 2482 (2019), the Group of Friends urges Member States to ensure that all measures taken to counter terrorism, including measures taken to counter the financing of terrorism, comply with obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, the Group of Friends expresses grave concern at the dramatic increase in the number of persons facing crisis levels of acute food insecurity. More efforts are urgently needed to prevent and alleviate hunger in armed conflict, in line with international humanitarian law and resolutions 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021). The members of the Group of Friends that are parties to the Rome Statute reiterate their call on States parties to the Rome Statute to consider the ratification of the amendment related to the intentional use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in non-international armed conflicts.

Fourthly, fighting impunity is of paramount importance in ensuring that violations do not go unpunished and that justice is delivered to victims. Consequently, we also echo the Secretary-General's recommendations to ensure accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law.

Fifthly, the Group of Friends recalls that the protection of civilians is a priority mandated objective for many peacekeeping missions around the world and a central element of peacekeeping reform initiatives. We also commend peacekeeping missions and peacekeepers for their continued work in implementing protection of civilians mandates despite the difficult situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We collectively attach crucial importance to the full and effective implementation of protection of civilians mandates by United Nations peacekeeping operations in a comprehensive and integrated manner, and we stress the need to ensure that the protection of civilians be prioritized in the context of mission transitions,

drawdowns and exit strategies. By the same token, the centrality of protection should also be an integral part of special political missions, where relevant.

The Group of Friends reiterates its call for the Security Council to ensure that United Nations peacekeeping operations have clear and realistic mandates and that the General Assembly allocates sufficient resources that are consistent with the mandate and the situation on the ground. In that regard, we express our full support for specialized and dedicated protection functions and teams deployed to United Nations peacekeeping missions and within the United Nations Secretariat.

We continue to encourage the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations, as they have a significant impact in the pursuit of peace and protection of civilians. The Group of Friends further stresses the importance of all peacekeeping personnel receiving adequate predeployment and supplementary in-mission training. We also call for performance and accountability in the implementation of protection of civilians mandates, in line with resolution 2436 (2018) and the Integrated Peacekeeping Performance and Accountability Framework.

Allow me to also draw the Council's attention to the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Central Tracing Agency this year. The tragedy of persons unaccounted for and their next of kin concerns millions of persons. The Group of Friends calls on all Member States and parties to armed conflict to fully collaborate with the ICRC and other relevant actors with the aim of elucidating the fate of the missing. Member States should ensure that efficient mechanisms are in place to that end, in line with international humanitarian law and resolution 2474 (2019).

Furthermore, prompt and transparent casualty recording can prevent persons from going missing in armed conflict. Casualty records can also provide valuable evidence in accountability processes, thereby supporting survivors' rights to truth, justice and reparations.

Finally, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423), armed conflicts can significantly contribute to the degradation of the natural environment, which in turn affects the population. The combination of armed conflict and several other factors, including environmental degradation, compounded with the effects of climate change, may lead to additional protection challenges and the displacement of millions of persons.

The Security Council and Member States should endeavour to enhance engagements to mitigate those risks for the protection of civilians. The Group of Friends takes note of the updated ICRC Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict and encourages Member States to take them into account in the implementation of the existing legal framework.

Annex 55**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Hadi Sinirlioğlu**

We welcome the convening of this annual open debate, which sheds light on the suffering of innocent people and gives an outlook for the future.

Over more than a year, the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has further worsened the already dire conditions and exacerbated the vulnerability of the least protected people. It is extremely urgent that the global ceasefire appeal by the Secretary-General be implemented for the protection of civilians in the most pressing conflict settings around the world. As a leading country in the humanitarian field, Turkey continues to do its part to alleviate human suffering.

In Syria, our efforts are focused on preventing a new humanitarian tragedy along our borders. The ceasefire reached between Turkey and the Russian Federation on 5 March 2020 in the Idlib de-escalation zone has contributed to efforts to implement the global ceasefire appeal by the Secretary-General and allowed for the return of 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes. Preserving the ceasefire in Idlib is a *sine qua non* for the protection of millions of vulnerable civilians living under dire conditions.

Unfortunately, the Syrian regime pursues its military campaign against the Syrian people. The heinous attack on Al-Atarib hospital in March claimed many innocent lives and imposed new stresses and limitations on the access of the local population to health-care services. In Syria, a health facility was attacked every four days last year, the majority of which were located in the north-west of the country.

Three million IDPs living in the region are in acute need of humanitarian assistance and depend on the aid channelled from Turkey. The United Nations cross-border mechanism continues to be the only instrument for delivering assistance, including medical items and COVID-19 vaccines in particular, to the most vulnerable. There is an urgent need to sustain United Nations cross-border operations by providing additional crossing points.

Turkey will continue to support and strengthen the resilience of the Syrian people by its own means and by facilitating cross-border humanitarian operations. As part of efforts to restore life in northern Syria and recover infrastructure targeted by the Syrian regime and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) terrorist organization, Turkey has repaired hospitals in Jarabulus, Azaz, Afrin, Al-Bab, Tel Abyad and Ras Al-Ayn, established a mobile health centre in Afrin and constructed a hospital in Jindires.

In line with one of the objectives of this meeting — to address the root causes of conflicts — the topic of handling and approaching armed terrorist organizations deserves our due attention. The terrorist organization PKK/YPG is actively engaged in a wide range of abuses and usurpations in the wider region. The Secretary-General reports that Syria is among the countries with the highest recorded numbers of improvised explosive devices. The PKK/YPG is responsible for the majority of those attacks.

In north-east Syria, electricity disruptions by the PKK/YPG, which are affecting the proper functioning of the Allouk water station, have continued at alarming levels since November 2019. That has resulted in a severely restrained water supply to half a million people living in the region.

The PKK is using its presence in northern Iraq to organize terrorist attacks against Turkey. It is well-reported that the terrorist organization not only controls

areas of land in northern Iraq but also prevents the Iraqi authorities from providing even basic services to local people in those areas.

In such cases, the United Nations and the international community should seek a balance between the fight against terrorism and engagement with local non-State actors for the protection of civilians. It goes without saying that those non-State actors should not be in possession of arms or considered as legitimate parties given their de facto armed status.

From the perspective of eliminating the root causes of human suffering, our collective action should be based on empowering and assisting legitimate administrations in their simultaneous efforts to combat terrorism and safeguard the protection of civilians. Another component of our efforts should be to institute accountability.

In Libya, we are witnessing the widespread use of violence by militias against civilians, including, but not limited to, inhumane treatment, torture, arbitrary detention and the murder of detainees. The discovery of mass graves in Tarhouna was a stark reminder of the crimes committed by Haftar and his associated militias. Last week, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court briefed the Security Council on the atrocities committed by the so-called Libyan National Army, including grave violations perpetrated in Mitiga prison, the handing down of the death penalty by military courts in eastern Libya, following secret trials, and the killing of human rights lawyer Ms. Hanane Al-Barassi (see S/2021/483). All criminals should be brought to justice.

The most vulnerable groups continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts.

In Afghanistan, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented that 30 per cent of civilian casualties last year were children. The level of violence in the country has unfortunately reached peak levels, which shows that the risk of new waves of mass migration has increased.

In the light of the ongoing withdrawal of United States and NATO forces from Afghanistan, it is imperative that the international community maintain its provision of effective and consistent support to the Government, institutions and people of Afghanistan. It is also paramount to keep the perspective of a negotiated settlement alive. In order to support and reinvigorate the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha, Turkey is ready to host a high-level conference in Istanbul, together with Qatar and the United Nations and with the participation of the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

In 1999, the Security Council formally recognized that the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a matter of international peace and security. After more than 20 years, which has provided enough space to create the necessary tools to enhance that agenda, the Council should display a unified position by upholding its responsibilities in order to ease suffering around the world.

Annex 56**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations**

I would like to express my appreciation to the Chinese presidency for holding this important debate to discuss the current state of and challenges facing the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for presenting his report on the issue (S/2021/423), as well as for his reference to the situation of civilians, including children and persons with disabilities, living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Since the protection of civilians in armed conflict was included as an item on the Security Council's agenda in 1999, it has remained one of the priorities of the Security Council and receives broad attention from the international community. As we have seen in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Myanmar, Syria and many other countries, civilians continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts.

The urbanization of conflicts, the damage and destruction of civilian infrastructure and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are of particular concern. Conflicts also cause acute hunger, environmental deterioration, large-scale displacement and exacerbated vulnerabilities in different contexts.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has only exacerbated existing issues of civilian insecurity during armed conflict. Violence, threats and attacks against medical personnel and facilities persist, in violation of international humanitarian law. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the already weak health-care systems in armed conflict situations are being overwhelmed, and health-care services have been undermined at the time when they are most needed.

We agree with the Secretary-General that those issues are a clear signal to the international community of the need to pursue accountability for international crimes in a systematic and universal manner, strengthen our collective responsibility to prevent and stop attacks against civilians in conflict situations and ensure that such attacks do not recur. That should remain a priority.

In that regard, Ukraine strongly denounces the indiscriminate firing of rockets into the territory of Israel by Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza. We are concerned by reports that rockets were also launched from the territories of Lebanon and Syria. The Ukrainian delegation recognizes the right of Israel to self-defence from massive missile attacks and recalls the appeal of the President of Ukraine to de-escalate the situation in order to save lives. We stress that all parties should undertake all the necessary precautions while conducting military operations so as to guarantee the protection of the civilian population, especially women and children, as a matter of highest priority. In that context, Ukraine is deeply concerned by reports that Hamas is using civilian infrastructure and civilians as a cover for its operations.

We note the importance of addressing the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Gaza. We call for the granting of humanitarian access to ensure the free flow of aid, goods and persons to and from Gaza.

I shall turn now to Europe. As a result of violations by one of the permanent members of the Security Council of the norms and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law, the Russian-Ukrainian international armed conflict has now been claiming the lives of civilians in my country for

more than seven years. The conflict and the temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, have rendered the subject of the protection of civilians a very practical and daily issue for my country.

The dire humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions continues to deteriorate and people are expected to require humanitarian assistance. More than half a million people live in the areas directly affected by the armed conflict, while another 2 million people are exposed to landmines and explosive remnants of war. That area, according to the United Nations, has already become one of the most mine-contaminated stretches of land in the world.

The armed conflict has continued to affect the enjoyment of economic and social rights by the civilian population, especially by the more than 5 million residents of the conflict-affected areas and internally displaced persons. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), children, older persons and persons in vulnerable situations are at increased risk of being left behind in achieving sustainable development due to the conflict.

In the context of the spread of the acute respiratory disease known as COVID-19, the state of protection of the life and health of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories has become even more alarming and requires special attention from the international community.

Ukraine pays special attention to issues related to compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law in armed conflict, as well as the prevention of and response to forced displacement and the protection of women and children affected by armed conflict, including conflict-related sexual violence.

As a party to core international instruments relating to the protection of civilians, we consistently promote and support all efforts aimed at strengthening their implementation and advocate ensuring respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in both bilateral and multilateral forums.

In contrast, another party to a conflict — the Russian Federation — is ignoring General Assembly resolutions and OHCHR recommendations, while practising a cherry-picking approach to its obligations under international humanitarian law. Last year, Russia revoked the statement it made at the ratification of Protocol Additional I to the Geneva Conventions on the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. The statement recognized the competence of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, which is a key mechanism for the achievement of the objectives undertaken by the States parties to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Protocol Additional I, to respect and ensure respect for the provisions of those Treaties.

Such an act shows disregard for international humanitarian law, as does Russia's reluctance to allow the Commission's investigation of facts alleged to constitute a grave breach, as defined in the Conventions and the Protocol, or other serious violations of the Conventions and the Protocol Additional. In order to avoid responsibility, a similar approach was taken by Russia with regard to the implementation of European Court of Human Rights decisions, as well as the decision not to become a party to the Rome Statute after signature.

Time and again, we have urged Russia to uphold all its obligations under applicable international law as an occupying Power, in particular to ensure the proper and unimpeded access of international human rights monitoring missions and non-governmental human rights organizations to Crimea, pursuant to General Assembly

resolutions 71/205, 72/190, 73/263 and 74/168. Russia must immediately release unlawfully detained Ukrainian citizens without preconditions; end the practice of forcible transfers and deportations of protected persons, including detainees, to areas outside the occupied territory; and refrain from compelling residents of Crimea to serve in the armed forces of the Russian Federation, inter alia.
