



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8543rd meeting
 Tuesday, 11 June 2019, 10 a.m.
 New York

Provisional

President: Sheikh Al Sabah (Kuwait)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
France	Mr. Delattre
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Kuzmin
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Missing persons in armed conflict

Letter dated 3 June 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/458)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Missing persons in armed conflict

Letter dated 3 June 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2019/458)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the following countries to participate in this meeting: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Palau, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay. There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Maurer is joining the meeting via video-conference from Geneva.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/458, which contains a letter dated 3 June 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2019/475, which contains the text of a draft resolution that has been sponsored by the countries that appear on the list that is also before Council members.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2474 (2019).

I now give the floor to Ms. Ghelani.

Ms. Ghelani: I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

We very much welcome today's discussion and adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), on missing persons in armed conflict. Importantly, the resolution affirms the obligation of parties to conflict to prevent persons from going missing and to clarify their fate if they do go missing. It comes not a moment too soon. Alarming numbers of persons go missing in armed conflicts. They might be captured by warring parties and held incommunicado in secret locations, where they may ultimately die. They might be victims of extrajudicial executions, their bodies hidden in unmarked graves. Sometimes they are civilians merely fleeing violence for their own safety, girls and boys who become separated from their families, and elderly persons or persons with disabilities who are unable to flee or are left behind. They might be civilians or combatants, killed during fighting, and their remains improperly managed or disposed of.

Whatever the circumstances, the families of the missing are left in a state of absolute despair, not knowing the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones. When the missing person is also the breadwinner, the impact on families can be economically devastating. In some situations, the relatives of missing persons

find it hard to remarry, claim their inheritance, receive benefits and rebuild their lives in the face of legal and administrative obstacles. Moreover, the anguish and uncertainty can jeopardize the prospects for reconstructing the social fabric of conflict-affected communities and societies.

There is no comprehensive figure for those missing in conflict, but what we do know is that the situation is dire. For example — as the Council will hear from the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) — more than 10,000 cases of missing persons have been opened by the ICRC in relation to the Syrian conflict. The organization has also received 13,000 requests for support in finding missing relatives from families in Nigeria. In Myanmar, South Sudan and Yemen, United Nations bodies have reported cases of enforced disappearance of persons deprived of their liberty, along with many other persons reported to be missing. Meanwhile, cases of missing persons that occurred years and even decades ago in the Balkans, Lebanon, Nepal and Sri Lanka, for example, are still pending clarification.

What we need, as the Secretary-General noted in his report last month on the protection of civilians (S/2019/373), is for parties to conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law as it relates to missing persons. The law prohibits enforced disappearance. It requires that parties take all feasible measures to account for those reported missing as a result of armed conflict. It enshrines the right of the families of the missing to receive information on their fate and whereabouts. In turn, this entails putting in place appropriate domestic laws and policies, including mechanisms to search for the missing and respond to the needs of their relatives. These mechanisms should entail the collection, management and protection of information on missing persons; the establishment of necessary forensic and other processes for managing human remains; and the provision of psychological, legal and financial support needed by the families of the missing.

The resolution adopted by the Council today is rightly ambitious. It calls upon States and parties to conflict to put in place these and other specific measures. We would encourage parties to conflict and States to avail themselves of the support of the ICRC and other key actors in establishing the necessary legal and policy frameworks related to missing persons and the needs of their families.

As the resolution rightly stresses, strengthening the role and capacity of relevant existing national, regional and international mechanisms to provide advice and support to Member States will be essential. We would also encourage Member States to engage in networking, exchange of experience, best practices and other means of cooperation on the issue of missing persons as a result of armed conflict.

In that regard, we welcome the launch this year of the ICRC Missing Persons Project, which will build a community of practice; bring together experts and practitioners to work with families, Member States, international organizations and other actors to help stop people from going missing; find those who have gone missing and support their families.

The scale of the problem can and must be addressed, principally by respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. For the sake of those missing now and who may be in the future, and for the families that suffer so much as they wait for news, it is incumbent upon us all to take action.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Ghelani for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Maurer.

Mr. Maurer: Some of the most horrific consequences of war are those that we cannot see. When traumas are invisible, they are overlooked, ignored or deprioritized. This is perhaps most starkly evident when it comes to the critical issue of missing persons. Every day, people go missing because of conflict, violence, disaster or during migration.

Today, as we focus on the issue of missing persons in armed conflict, I have to report that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has observed an alarming increase in cases recent years. In 2018 alone, over 45,000 new cases were registered by the ICRC Central Tracing Agency — the neutral entity mandated by the Geneva Conventions. We know that this figure is the tip of the iceberg and does not convey the true extent of the problem or do justice to the suffering of each and every family.

I thank Kuwait for its stewardship in bringing forward this debate. The ICRC welcomes the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019) as the first Security Council resolution fully dedicated to the issue missing persons in conflict and commends the Council's commitment to the issue.

Every time someone goes missing, families wait for answers. Ricocheting between hope and despair, they mark anniversaries: one year, two years, ten years. The trauma of ambiguous loss is one of the deepest wounds of war. The pain infects whole communities, lasting decades and preventing societies from reconciling. The ICRC is a daily witness to this suffering. Our teams are frequently approached with pleas for help — mothers searching for sons, husbands searching for their wives. And sometimes there are answers. Every minute, the ICRC, together with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, helps a family separated by conflict to restore contact.

Yet so much more can be done. If parties to conflict fulfil their obligations to search for missing persons and if they manage the dead systematically and with respect, missing persons can be found, remains can be identified and answers can be given. We have the legal framework. International humanitarian law sets out obligations on preventing persons from going missing in armed conflict and clarifying of the fate and whereabouts of those who do. And we have practical experience. Preventing family separation — for instance, during evacuations — registering all persons deprived of their liberty or issuing identity disks to armed forces are all concrete steps that can be taken today.

What is needed is stronger political will and cooperation. This is crystal clear to the ICRC, as the custodian of international humanitarian law and from decades of experience working with parties to conflicts to resolve cases of missing persons. The ICRC's work extends from chairing coordination mechanisms, advising on national laws and policies, to registering detainees, supporting with families and offering technical forensic expertise.

We have seen what can be achieved through political will and cooperation. The agreement on identifying the remains of unidentified soldiers involved in the Falkland/Malvinas Islands conflict is a striking example. We also note, too, the joint efforts of the Gulf War Tripartite Commission on the recovery of remains in southern Iraq in just the past few weeks. These breakthroughs offer enormous hope to families that have waited decades for answers.

Today's wars pose new challenges but also new opportunities to search for missing persons. While the issue remains complex, there is now a wealth of new

sources of information that can facilitate the search. As the ICRC Central Tracing Agency prepares to mark 150 years of service next year, we are modernizing our approaches, including by investing in improved search technologies, such as facial recognition.

Additionally, there is a growing body of expertise and experience, including in forensic science, to improve prevention and response tactics. The ICRC is building a community of practice and, through the Missing Persons Project, it is reaching out to experts and practitioners, international and non-governmental organizations, State institutions and families to identify best practices, develop technical recommendations and coordinate our efforts.

It is clear to us that the way in which the issue of missing persons is addressed during and after conflict can determine the scale of the problem, its repercussions on communities and future relations between parties to the conflict. Crucially, cases of missing persons need to be handled without discrimination; missing persons and their families are not bargaining chips.

I urge Member States, in implementing today's resolution and beyond, to adopt these four steps:

First, States and parties to armed conflicts must respect and ensure that international humanitarian law is respected in their operations. They must uphold families' right to know; ensure that civilians are protected; ensure that no one disappears in armed conflict as result of hostilities or after arrest; and ensure the systematic and dignified management of the dead. In particular, we call on parties to conflict to enable the ICRC to access detention facilities and facilitate family contact. This important step would go a long way in preventing those detained from going missing.

Secondly, States must put in place preventative measures. Without early action, the work to account for missing people only redoubles, as do the suffering of families and the future support required to address their needs. Obligations do not start after hostilities come to an end.

Thirdly, the issue of the missing must be first and foremost humanitarian and not part of political agendas and accountability processes. States must address cases of missing persons without discrimination. Too often, we see political manipulation of this issue or families of former enemies stigmatized or blocked from services.

Fourthly, States must support professional, neutral, impartial humanitarian action on the issue of the missing. Through its technical experts and institutions, the United Nations can join efforts with the ICRC and local and international organizations to support the creation of a global community of practice and universally recognized technical standards and recommendations.

We urgently need stronger political will and commitment on the part of all actors to implement their obligations on the missing. We ask States to live up to their responsibilities and to take the steps necessary to address this profound yet overlooked humanitarian challenge.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Maurer for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

It is my pleasure to participate today in this meeting on the important humanitarian issue of missing persons in armed conflict. I welcome the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), drafted and submitted by the State of Kuwait. The resolution has human and humane significance because it addresses an issue that is close to the hearts of the people of Kuwait. It is aimed at promoting international efforts to address the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. I also thank all members for supporting us during the negotiations on the resolution.

The resolution has important human and humanitarian aspects. It seeks to promote the institutional and normative framework for protecting civilians, as well as international efforts to address the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. This is in line with the attention that the Council has focused on the issue of protecting civilians over the past 20 years and with the humanitarian resolutions it has adopted, free of political considerations. The most recent of these is the resolution we have adopted today with the aim of preventing any persons from going missing as a result of conflict.

I commend the briefings by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr. Peter Maurer, and the Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Reena Ghelani, which have enriched today's discussion.

We meet today as the international arena is confronting increasing challenges that threaten international peace and security. Those challenges have become more complexed and intertwined over the years. Countless civilians are impacted by conflict and other forms of violence that affect civilians and have dangerous humanitarian implications that require comprehensive and sustainable solutions, the absence of which may prolong conflict and represent an obstacle to security and stability.

One of the humanitarian challenges addressed in international norms and laws is the issue of missing persons in armed conflict, which has a tragic effect on the lives of affected civilians and their families. We are totally convinced that its many important dimensions require the attention of the international community and should be dealt with at all stages of a conflict and beyond through clear and tested practices.

International human rights law and international humanitarian law have identified the tools that we need to use in order to protect communities and civilians, as well as to ensure all their rights and a life of freedom and dignity, free of violations and humanitarian suffering. These tools include the identification of solutions pertaining to the issue of missing persons in armed conflict.

Missing persons are the main victims of any war or conflict. We must commit to using these tools and practices in all negotiations in order to build trust in the political process after a conflict, leading to peace agreements, peacebuilding and lasting peace. Parties to a conflict must therefore provide all necessary information on the fate of missing persons in order to ensure family reunification or to determine the location of their remains, in line with agreed international and humanitarian norms. Furthermore, impunity is prohibited and those responsible for causing persons to go missing, for hiding related evidence or for covering for the perpetrators of crimes against humanity must be held to account.

Committing to international humanitarian law will pave the way for peace. The resolution adopted today by the Council will contribute to raising international awareness and to bridging the gaps in the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. It encourages relevant national, regional and

international humanitarian organizations to take the necessary measures to facilitate search operations and appropriately manage relevant information on missing persons in order to determine their fate, while ensuring the necessary political will and cooperation among all parties to a conflict.

The State of Kuwait has tragic experience regarding this humanitarian issue. We are pursuing our efforts to determine the fate of our missing nationals since the war that liberated Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991. The fate of 236 of 605 missing persons has been determined. We commend the Council for following up on this issue, in line with its relevant resolutions. We also commend the Iraqi Government for its cooperation and serious efforts to finalize this issue in the framework of the meetings held by the Tripartite Commission and its Technical Subcommittee, chaired by the ICRC. We thank the ICRC for its efforts, determination and assistance to all parties in order to ascertain the fate of missing persons and alleviate the suffering of their families and relatives.

We renew our commitment to doing our best to strengthen the efforts of the international community to maintain international peace and security and support peacebuilding and comprehensive development in the context of preventive diplomacy. We will contribute to joint humanitarian action, in line with the established and steadfast foreign policy of the State of Kuwait, as a tool for conflict prevention and for helping to anchor the foundations of stability, dialogue and mediation by addressing all current and emerging crises and global instability. We will be guided by international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as international resolutions.

Fulfilling our international obligations based on responsibility, partnership and international solidarity is the best way to tackle all the challenges that we face. We commend all parties and organizations for the role they play in mitigating conflict-related threats and building peace among countries and parties to conflicts.

The State of Kuwait will use all of its capacities and make every effort to support those endeavours in order to promote international cooperation and build the capacities of other countries to protect civilians and alleviate humanitarian suffering. In that regard, I once again express my thanks and appreciation to all those who cooperated and helped us in adopting today's resolution, which ensures that Kuwait and the rest of

the world will not forget the issue of missing persons in armed conflict.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor those other members of the Council who wish to make statements

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to formally welcome you today, Mr. President, to the Council. I congratulate you and your team on presiding over it and thank you for the great work you have already done this month.

Every year, thousands of people go missing amid violence and armed conflict. Every one of those missing persons is an individual — a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, a sister, a brother. Their absence is directly felt by their loved ones for a lifetime. Uncertainty about the fate of family members, not knowing whether they are dead or alive, can continue for many years after the fighting ends. The trauma that causes can undermine relationships among communities and makes peacebuilding and reconciliation harder.

The circumstances in which disappearances occur can vary greatly. As armed conflicts create significant mass displacement, many migrants, refugees or internally displaced people go missing because they are afraid or unable to contact their families. Combatants and civilians may go missing as a result of abductions, mass atrocities, forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and, of course, extrajudicial killings. Women and children may be particularly at risk of being abducted for sexual exploitation or enslavement.

The actions of non-State armed groups pose a particular challenge. In north-east Nigeria, Boko Haram has abducted hundreds if not thousands of women and children, including 274 girls kidnapped from their secondary school in Chibok in 2014. Five years on, more than 112 of those girls are still missing. In Iraq, between 5,000 and 7,000 Yazidi women and girls were abducted and subjected to sexual slavery by Da'esh in 2014. Today, more than 3,000 Yazidi women and children remain unaccounted for. Given the scale of the global missing persons phenomenon, resolution 2474 (2019), adopted this morning, provides an important opportunity to review and strengthen international cooperation on this issue.

The United Kingdom welcomes Kuwait's leadership on this important and complex issue and

we were pleased to vote in favour of the resolution that Kuwait submitted. The resolution underlines the existing international legal obligations in this area and builds on the work of existing mechanisms. It also underscores that States bear the primary responsibility to protect their civilians and uphold the human rights of all individuals within their territory.

But we need international cooperation in addressing the issue of missing persons, both during and after conflicts. After conflicts, international support to resolve this issue is frequently an important factor in promoting post-conflict peace, security and reconciliation. In that connection, I would like to commend the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the International Commission on Missing Persons for providing long-term institutional capacity and technical expertise to Governments with regard to the location, recovery and identification of missing persons.

As we have heard today, the issue of missing persons is a complex and prevalent problem in Iraq and Kuwait, but also in many conflict situations around the world.

In Kosovo we welcome the efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the Government of Kosovo to address legacy issues, including investigating cases of missing persons. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, more than 17,000 people are still registered as missing after the conflicts that broke out in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Justice for all victims and their families is a crucial part of future stability. The United Kingdom calls on both Pristina and Belgrade to support all necessary action, which must include assisting existing domestic war-crimes courts in ensuring that outstanding cases of war crimes are heard. We urge political leaders to focus on those efforts rather than divisive political rhetoric, which only perpetuates antagonism.

Resolution 2474 (2019), adopted today, highlights the actions that Member States can take to prevent people from going missing in armed conflict. But sadly there are too many examples of States deliberately targeting civilians in armed conflict, including through arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in 2012 that enforced disappearance was used by the ruling regime in Syria to eliminate opposition

groups and create a climate of fear. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic estimates that at least 60,000 people have gone missing in Syria since the beginning of the civil war. Another 17,000 are believed to have gone missing as a result of Government repression before the beginning of the conflict. The United Kingdom underlines the importance of the work that 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 is undertaking on accountability and takes note of its plans to develop a system to categorize and classify material that might be relevant to locating missing persons.

Long after a conflict ends, families and communities are deeply affected by those who remain missing. Since the beginning of my diplomatic career, in Cyprus, I have met many families in this position, from a range of conflicts. They suffer every day, and those of us who have met them cannot fail to be moved by their suffering. They relive conflicts as others are able to move on. Whatever positions that Member States around this table take on individual conflicts, let us all agree collectively that resolving cases of missing persons should be a humanitarian priority, and let us try to remove this issue from the political arena.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, the delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to thank the delegation of Kuwait for organizing this important briefing on missing persons in armed conflict, as well as for its excellent leadership with respect to resolution 2474 (2019), which the Council has just adopted and which we were proud to sponsor. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our thanks to Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their insightful briefings.

As we in the Council can confirm, the growing complexity of armed conflicts increases their multidimensional impact on the civilian population while making the work of States, humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel to protect civilians in those contexts more difficult. As we have seen in the work of the Council, one aspect of armed conflict's

impact on people is the increased vulnerability of the groups that most need social protection in these circumstances, such as children, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and minorities. Another is the impact that people's disappearance has on their loved ones. It is one of the most harmful and lasting humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts, not only affecting people and families who face economic, legal and mental health challenges, but also with significant repercussions for the resolution of conflicts, the sustainability and consolidation of peace and sustainable development.

We know that although the available data on people who have disappeared during conflict is not exhaustive, the International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that some 140,000 people have disappeared around the world, 36,000 of them in Africa, and many of them as a result of armed conflicts. Accordingly, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea joins the Secretary-General's call for the parties to conflicts to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in relation to disappeared civilians, prevent enforced disappearances, take all possible measures to account for persons reported missing and defend their families' right to receive information about their fate and whereabouts.

The primary responsibility to protect the civilian population belongs to individual States. However, when that is not possible, and when States request it, the international community, including humanitarian organizations, can provide support, in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for the sovereignty of States and based on a just and legitimate cause. There are obligations under international humanitarian law designed to prevent people's disappearance, hold accountable those who are responsible for such disappearances, and ensure that those obligations are met during an armed conflict, not just after hostilities have ended. That includes being committed to finding the disappeared through records and the appropriate handling of human remains, among other measures.

In that regard, it is the responsibility of the conflicting parties to establish effective mechanisms and measures to determine the whereabouts of disappeared civilians and refrain from using disappearance as a military tactic, so that the families and communities of the disappeared can move forward, without underlying tensions and with trust between communities and institutions. In that context, we would

like to acknowledge the commendable commitment and work of the International Committee of the Red Cross to make visible at the global level the experiences of associations of missing persons in the world and its initiatives to find solutions to the problem of disappeared people across the globe, particularly through its Central Tracing Agency. We encourage States to continue to collaborate and support it in that regard.

This meeting is a step forward in terms of strengthening the Security Council's work in the area of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. We believe that focusing on disappeared persons in armed conflicts is a key element in that area because of its impact on international peace and security, for which the Council is responsible. In that regard, we appreciate the good work being done by governmental, humanitarian and human rights organizations and peacekeeping missions in searching for and identifying missing civilians, and we encourage them to strengthen those efforts. We also request that this be reflected in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I thank you very much, Mr. President, for personally attending the meeting today. I think that underlines the importance that Kuwait, based on its history and experience, attaches to this issue. While I am praising you, I would also like to extend my congratulations to your Permanent Representative, Mr. Mansour Alotaibi, who worked very hard to get this done today. It is also his personal success.

What Kuwait did is very much in line with what Germany and France did during their joint presidencies when we placed humanitarian issues very high on the Security Council's agenda. I think it is very important that this body deal with those issues.

I would like to thank both of the briefers for their very impressive reports. I was dismayed by what Peter Maurer told us at the beginning of the meeting that there has actually been an alarming increase in the number of missing persons, despite the fact that we have clear international laws on that issue. That should really concern us. I would also like to express on this occasion my gratitude to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which has 150 years of experience, for what it does and what its work means and, when there are successes, what that means for individual families.

Germany is participating, of course. The German Red Cross is also working very hard on the issue. It has a long history, but at the same time we are focusing right now on current issues. We are working hard to locate the relatives of refugees and migrants who have arrived in Germany in the past years. Most of the requests that we have been able to meet came from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia and Eritrea.

Syria is, for us, the toughest case. The Secretary-General, in his report (S/2019/373), expresses particular concern about Syria. There are more than 10,000 cases of missing persons, but the total number of people arbitrarily detained and missing persons is believed to be more than tenfold that amount. I think our colleague from the United Kingdom mentioned 60,000. I think, if one takes into consideration everything, it would be even more. The problem and challenge in Syria is that this continues and there is no end to the missing persons; their numbers continue to grow. We therefore encourage the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria to work with the parties to secure the release of detainees and the location of missing persons, and we call for full cooperation.

It is clear that the Syrian regime has engaged in a systematic and widespread pattern of forcibly disappearing persons for political reasons, retaliation and gathering-intelligence. That is unacceptable and needs to be addressed.

Unfortunately, Syria is not the only case. Others have been mentioned already, including that of Nigeria. We all know the heartbreaking cases of the girls who have been abducted by Boko Haram. There have been other cases in South Sudan, Myanmar and, during an earlier war, in the Balkans. My British colleague mentioned the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo. There are still missing persons from that conflict today. We encourage all efforts to resolve those issues, which is very important not only for the families, but also for reconciliation.

With regard to resolution 2474 (2019), we co-sponsored it and we are very happy with it, but we would have liked the point with regard to accountability to be stronger. There is no reference to international criminal mechanisms because some members of the Council were against that. The Rome Statute clearly refers to enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity. We would have liked to have that reference in the resolution. We also want to take this occasion

to underline our full support for the work of the International Criminal Court.

I want to come back to the main issue, which is that this is a humanitarian issue. That was underlined in the remarks by the President of the ICRC. In the end, we have to make sure that all parties uphold the right of families to receive information on the fate of missing relatives. Governments, armed forces and armed groups have an obligation to provide information and to help reunite families. We call on all parties to work with the ICRC to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place that deal with missing persons, and that has to be done early on. The President of the Council mentioned how important it is for this to be already done when a conflict breaks out.

At the same time, in conflicts, as is the case in Syria and other places, we need Governments and parties to allow and facilitate the access of humanitarian personnel, and we need to safeguard humanitarian space.

Ultimately, resolving the issue of missing persons is very important for reconciliation and having a policy of preventing disappearance in place is very important for conflict prevention. That is why Germany has ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. We also believe that the work of the International Commission on Missing Persons is important.

Lastly, I would like to refer to what my colleague from Equatorial Guinea said with regard to how important is that the Security Council deal with questions of international humanitarian law and that international humanitarian law be respected because that relates directly to the preservation of peace and security and to the prevention of conflicts.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Kuwaiti presidency of the Security Council for organizing this briefing on missing persons in armed conflict. I also have the pleasure of welcoming your presence among us, Mr. President, which demonstrates that, as with many countries that have witnessed the horrors of war, the question of missing persons in armed conflict remains at the heart of your country's priorities. I join my voice to those who spoke before me in thanking Ms. Reena Ghelani and Mr. Peter Maurer for their informative briefings on how acute this phenomenon is.

The stories of thousands of missing men, women and children in armed conflict engages the entire international community and more specifically the entities that seek to defend human rights law and humanitarian law. The International Committee of the Red Cross is currently looking for more than a 100,000 missing persons around the world. In that regard, I recall that the number of reported cases represents only a minute portion of the people who are actually missing.

The respective reports of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians of May 2019 (S/2019/373), the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the International Committee of the Red Cross agree as to the scale and complexity of the phenomenon of missing persons in armed conflict. That requires us more than ever to take coordinated action to understand the profound trends of this phenomenon and identify collective effective solutions. That is why Côte d'Ivoire supported resolution 2474 (2019), which was adopted today by Council members. The resolution is distinguished by the relevance of the measures that are proposed for the prevention of disappearances, support for families, ways to fight impunity and support for the pursuit of truth.

Côte d'Ivoire is of the view that the appeal of the international community for the respect of international humanitarian law and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance during hostilities must transcend partisan positions to reflect our common commitment to the principle of the protection of civilians.

Similarly, the international community's firm stance against the proven challenges to the international legal framework must be demonstrated in the commitment of all States to cooperating fully with accountability mechanisms provided for that purpose for impartial investigations and prosecutions against the perpetrators of crimes related to the disappearance of persons. That is why my delegation believes that capacity-building in States emerging from conflict is absolutely vital. It should provide them with the necessary legal and institutional mechanisms to conduct national and international investigations that allow for the prosecution of individuals or groups guilty of enforced disappearances. In addition, the promotion of and respect for normative frameworks for the protection of civilians and to combat the phenomenon of enforced disappearances during conflict could be

more effective if our collective action were part of a preventive approach. That is the view of my delegation.

In that respect, the upstream registration of detainees and the sharing of information pertaining to detention cases could allow for the mapping of detention facilities and the identification of detainees, thereby facilitating the work of agencies specialized in protecting their rights and physical well-being. That approach would also force parties to conflict to face up to their responsibilities under international law and allow for the proper prosecution to be conducted if detainees were to go missing.

Similarly, the creation of databases, which foster information-sharing among detainees and their families, could prevent people from going missing and assist in the processing of human remains, according to established standards, so as to allow for the identification of missing persons. To that end, we are of the view that the establishment of a centralized tracing agency as a reference point for the creation of databases, which can serve as a neutral intermediary tool between parties to a conflict, is equally relevant.

Preventing the disappearance of persons in conflict would be in vain if political will and national, regional and international ownership did not support it. Indeed, although it is true that, under international humanitarian law, the responsibility for preventing disappearances and the search for missing persons lie first and foremost with local authorities, it is also true that it must be built upon as part of collective responsibility and sustained cooperation at the regional level. It is by combining our resources and sharing experiences and good practices that we will be able to fill the capacity gaps that exist in preventing the disappearance of persons during armed conflicts.

That is why Côte d'Ivoire encourages cooperation between the Iraqi and Kuwaiti authorities in order to provide a definitive answer to the issue of missing Kuwaiti nationals and facilitate the return of property, including Kuwaiti national archives. It is also why we intend to support the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh, which is responsible for collecting, storing and preserving evidence of crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Iraq.

The issue that brought use here today is inextricably linked to the persistence of armed conflicts. Working

together to prevent conflict throughout the world by combating their root causes is, as far as my delegation is concerned, the first step towards a definitive solution to the issue of missing persons. All of our energies should be invested to that end.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates Kuwait's initiative to convene a public meeting on the issue of missing persons in armed conflict and welcomes the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait to New York to preside over the meeting.

I thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Director Ghelani for their briefings.

Many decades ago, the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional established clear rules regarding the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. Regrettably, for quite some time that issue has not received sufficient attention or been effectively addressed. In recent years, the number of missing persons, as a result of armed conflict, has continued to increase. Behind the alarming statistics is one family after another subjected to endless suffering. They have the right to know the whereabouts of their missing relatives.

Resolution 2474 (2019), which was unanimously adopted today, is the first thematic resolution on the issue of missing persons in armed conflict adopted by the Council. It fully demonstrates that the Council places a high priority on the issue and stands firm in upholding international humanitarian law. It also has great significance for effectively addressing the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. China welcomes the resolution and is among its sponsors. I would like to commend the Government of Kuwait and its Permanent Mission for their considerable efforts in that regard.

If we are to fully address the issue of missing persons in armed conflict, we must eliminate the root causes of armed conflict. The Security Council should earnestly fulfil its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security by vigorously promoting the resolution of differences through dialogue, consultations and political negotiations to prevent conflict, peacefully resolve disputes and reduce the number of armed conflicts. We must firmly reject anachronistic ideas, such as the clash of civilizations, the Cold War mentality and zero-sum games; forge a constructive partnership featuring non-alliance and

non-confrontation and without the targeting of third parties; and work to establish international relations of a new kind, featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation, in a joint effort to build a community of shared future for humankind.

According to the Geneva Conventions, all parties to conflict, including the countries concerned, should assume responsibility for the search for missing persons in armed conflict and are obligated to inform their families of their whereabouts and help separated families to reunite. The Government of the country concerned bears the primary responsibility and plays an irreplaceable role. If conflict is unavoidable, parties should take effective measures, as soon as possible and when conditions allow, to prevent and reduce the disappearance of persons.

It is essential to register information on prisoners and other relevant persons, make every effort to search for missing persons and establish information-sharing and communication channels with their families. Cases involving a large number of people who have gone missing in armed conflict should be investigated in order to hold those responsible accountable, in line with domestic law and relevant international law. In that process, the judicial sovereignty of the countries concerned should be fully respected.

The international community should actively provide constructive assistance to the countries concerned on the basis of respect for national sovereignty. It is imperative to strengthen information and experience-sharing, help the countries concerned with capacity-building in areas of science and technology, such as forensic science, ground-penetrating radar and satellite positioning, among others, and respond to the issue of missing persons in armed conflict in a tailored manner. In that regard, China highly commends the ICRC for upholding the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and for playing a positive role in resolving relevant issues over the years. It is our hope that all humanitarian agencies can, in a humanitarian and professional spirit, play a constructive role in reducing the humanitarian impact of armed conflict and in searching for missing persons.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, and warmly congratulate him on his country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and for taking the initiative to convene today's

important meeting. Like my German colleague, I congratulate the Permanent Representative of Kuwait and his entire team. It is to that country's credit, marked as it has been by a conflict that left thousands of families without news of their loved ones, that it has convened the Council to address the issue of missing persons in armed conflict for the first time. I would also like to thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings and commitment.

The issue of missing persons is inherent to all armed conflicts, but it has been particularly acute in recent years. That is why France welcomes resolution 2474 (2019), which the Council has just adopted and which powerfully reaffirms the obligations that flow from the international humanitarian law and human rights law on the subject. In that regard, I want to highlight two main points. The first is the need for the parties to a conflict to prevent and respond to this issue, which relates to the protection of those who have not participated or are no longer participating in the hostilities in an armed conflict, while the second is the crucial importance of protecting people from enforced disappearances, including in times of armed conflict.

The starting point for our efforts in the Council is as much about the need to ensure respect for the obligations under international humanitarian law on the parties to an armed conflict as it is about a moral imperative. The suffering of the relatives of missing persons demands that of us. The pain of not knowing what has happened to a loved one is unbearable and inconsolable. Has that son or husband who was a member of the Syrian opposition been detained in the regime's prisons or killed under torture, like thousands of detainees? From Sri Lanka and Kosovo to Colombia, on every continent, conflicts have left thousands of missing persons in their wake. That is why it is essential for the Security Council to call on the parties to prevent disappearances, help the families of the disappeared reunite and enable the exchange of information about them and support for their families. They must also guarantee people's right to the truth.

In order to do that, it is crucial to cooperate with the ICRC, whose excellent work I want to commend once again, especially the Central Tracing Agency, which runs the Family Links Network. State action has to be deployed in complementarity with all the dedicated

mechanisms and humanitarian organizations on the ground. That is what France does in its areas of operation. French forces inform the ICRC systematically and as soon as possible about the people involved in hostilities whom they have detained, after they have been given a medical examination, and ensures the ICRC's access to them, in accordance with international humanitarian law. They also report their transfer to host countries and ensure that they have adequate guarantees from the authorities of the States concerned so that those who are being returned to them do not run the risk of enforced disappearance. After fighting has occurred, they report to the ICRC the location of the graves of the deceased, who are buried with dignity and in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law. France contributes to efforts to identify and search for missing persons, whether civilians or combatants, keeping in mind the concerns of relatives. Those are the same obligations for parties involved in conflicts that France itself respects with regard to soldiers of its own who are missing in combat.

At the United Nations, France supports recognizing disappeared-person status for Blue Helmets and developing a policy that takes that status fully into account. Respect for the families of the disappeared and the principles of responsibility, prevention and reparation are at stake.

My second point is about the issue of enforced disappearances. No war or exceptional circumstances can justify them. The disappearance of a person is an extremely serious crime when it is the result of deliberate action by a State that is followed by a denial of that disappearance or by concealing the truth about the person's fate and whereabouts. Widespread or systematic enforced disappearance is a crime against humanity, and in that connection I want to emphasize the role of the International Criminal Court and the investigative mechanisms whose job it is to collect the evidence of such crimes. Those crimes are certainly not a thing of the past or of a particular region. In that regard, I would like to remind the Council of the November 2018 report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Death Notifications in the Syrian Arab Republic*, which describes the fact that tens of thousands of people are missing in Syria after being in the hands of pro-Government forces.

Death certificates, when they exist, are a charade. They do not provide the credible response that is

expected by families, who are left, sometimes for years, in uncertainty about the real circumstances of the disappearance and the fate of their relatives, or who cannot give them a burial once they have learned of their death. Those certificates issued by the regime cannot absolve it of crimes for which it still has to answer. In that context, France, which was a sponsor of resolution 2474 (2019), regrets that the text does not explicitly mention the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which is a crucial instrument for combating disappearances in times of peace as well as of war, and to guarantee the right to the truth. That is why France calls on all States to ratify it and cooperate with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

In conclusion, my country solemnly reaffirms the importance of upholding respect for international humanitarian law as we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. It is important that States take concrete steps to strengthen their implementation, which is why, together with Germany, France will launch a humanitarian call to action to which our Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, committed on 1 April, alongside his German counterpart, Heiko Maas. The universal ratification of the relevant conventions, such as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Rome Statute, are part of that.

Mr. Kuzmin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, and your Kuwaiti colleagues for the invitation to address the issue of missing persons in armed conflict. We are grateful to the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as to the Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their contributions to the discussion.

Over the past 20 years, the topic of the protection of civilians has occupied a special place in the work of the Council, as is evidenced by resolution 2474 (2019), which we adopted today. The Russian delegation voted in favour of the resolution, motivated by reasons of humanity and in the hope that the resolution will help families that have been separated by war to learn the fate of their loved ones and perhaps even save some of their lives.

We greatly appreciate the role of the ICRC in this issue. We also believe that the International Commission on Missing Persons is doing necessary and useful work, especially with regard to providing assistance to States concerned in identifying missing persons. However, we take the generally accepted approach to the term “missing persons in armed conflict” as applying not only to civilians, but also to military personnel whose fate remains unknown when a conflict ends. Sadly, the objective reality is that people go missing as a result of any war, and the reasons for that are many. War is an evil in and of itself, and it would be an unacceptable simplification to reduce the issue of missing persons in armed conflict exclusively to a problem of international criminal responsibility.

At Security Council meetings held under the agenda item “Protection of civilians in armed conflict” we often hear a very important point. States already have at their disposal all the international legal instruments essential to alleviating the plight of civilians in times of war. I am referring to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. The issue is having the political will to properly implement those documents, and that is fully applicable to the situation of missing persons in armed conflict.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Like other speakers, I would like to welcome Your Excellency as President of the Security Council and to thank Kuwait for convening this very important meeting. I look forward to the discussion. I would also like to thank Mr. Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their valuable briefings.

Again like others, Indonesia commends Kuwait on taking up the difficult but essential issue of missing persons in armed conflict. We also congratulate you, Mr. President, on the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019) on the issue of missing persons in armed conflict, initiated by Kuwait. Indonesia supports the resolution, and we believe that its implementation will strengthen efforts towards preventing persons from going missing as a result of armed conflict and serve to meaningfully address the situation of such persons. The issue is indeed an integral part of advancing our efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict.

Last month, during Indonesia’s presidency of the Security Council, our Minister for Foreign Affairs

presided over the open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV.8534). The protection of civilians in armed conflict has been an important part of Indonesia's constitutional mandate and will continue to be a significant element of our foreign policy.

The number of missing persons in armed conflict presented in the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373) is alarming. More than 23,000 requests have been received by the ICRC in relation to only two armed conflicts. This morning, as Mr. Maurer also mentioned, there are a large number of missing persons and in 2018 alone, more than 45,000 new cases were registered. Once again, that is an alarming number, especially since, as Mr. Maurer said, that figure is only the tip of the iceberg. Something must be done in that regard.

While historically conflicts have taken a toll on civilians, that must not be an accepted fact. In that context, Indonesia would like to emphasize the following three pertinent points.

My first point is on the importance of preventing persons from going missing as a result of armed conflict. The establishment of information centres for coordination and the pooling of information are necessary upon the outbreak of a conflict in order to minimize the number of missing persons. Concurrently, providing appropriate training to armed forces, ensuring detainee registration, producing proper means of identification and establishing well-functioning processing systems that involve all the authorities concerned are among the necessary measures. Prevention should be the priority.

Secondly, the development and upholding of national laws, along with complying with responsibilities under the relevant international humanitarian instruments, are vital. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 are a key part of the legal framework to safeguard civilians in armed conflict. Even those countries that are not yet a party to those instruments should undertake efforts to align with them. There should not be any doubt. Parties to armed conflict bear the primary responsibility for taking all necessary steps to ensure the protection of civilians, including reducing the number of cases of missing persons.

Thirdly, increased international cooperation and support are an important way forward to address the issue. The developments in forensics can lead to the bolstering of efforts to find and identify missing persons

in armed conflicts. Sharing information and expertise in the areas of science and modern technology is a useful way to reduce the number of missing persons. However, it should be ensured that such support and cooperation are tailored to respond to the needs of the country in conflict and are provided at its request.

Last but not least, we fully concur that the issue of missing persons should feature prominently in dialogues and peace processes to resolve conflicts from the outset. We should focus on the humanitarian aspect in addressing the issue.

Reaffirming Indonesia's support for today's topic, we hope that our deliberations will contribute meaningfully to advancing the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, focusing in particular on the humanitarian aspect.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and your presence, Mr. Minister, here among us at this Security Council briefing. We thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings, which have provided us with a comprehensive and detailed picture of the situation of missing persons in armed conflict. At the same time, we wish to acknowledge their particular contribution in this area, which the ICRC itself has called a hidden tragedy.

It is clearly an ongoing and significant problem, where, despite the difficulty in having exact figures for the number of missing persons in armed conflict, the data available reflect a situation described by the Secretary-General as alarming, amounting to several tens of thousands of cases.

Although such efforts are compounded by extreme situations on the ground, which make it difficult to search for missing civilians and other protected persons, it is possible to take preventive measures in this context, such as proper registration, exchange of information and avoiding actions that violate international obligations under the Geneva Conventions.

We understand that the situation of a person missing in armed conflict has two dimensions: on the one hand, that of the victim and, on the other hand, the concern and distress of their close relatives. The latter is enshrined in international humanitarian law,

which establishes the right of family members to know the fate of a missing person and provides for the return of their remains. That can also be seen as a matter of human rights.

The positive aspects of that are the value of healing open wounds and easing tensions, not only of the family but of society as a whole, with a view to subsequently allowing for accountability and reconciliation. We recognize that this situation is particularly sensitive in the case of missing children given their extreme vulnerability and helplessness. We believe that there must be specific State and international action to deal with such cases, including their protection and identification.

We are convinced that focusing on and considering this situation will help to establish appropriate mechanisms to promote good practices, the exchange of experiences and modern technology, and voluntary funding with a view to providing an immediate and collaborative response capacity so as to find and identify missing persons.

In that regard, in addition to acknowledging the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international and regional organizations and mechanisms, we recognize the work of the International Commission on Missing Persons, based in The Hague. However, on this occasion, we would like to welcome and commend the initiative and leadership of Kuwait on this topic and the excellent work of your delegation, Mr. President, which has enabled us to adopt the important resolution 2474 (2019) on the issue this morning and which we were pleased to co-sponsor.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): I would like to thank Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their insightful briefings.

South Africa co-sponsored and supported the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019) on missing persons in armed conflict, but it is also heartening to know that some of the countries experiencing conflict as we speak also co-sponsored the resolution.

Let me commence by welcoming the convening of this meeting on this matter as a stand-alone item for the first time, giving it the attention it deserves. We would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the Kuwait

presidency, especially our friend Ambassador Alotaibi, for their efforts to focus attention on this crucial matter. Kuwait has had the misfortune of experiencing the devastating impact and trauma of missing persons in armed conflict situations first-hand, as have many other countries. We hope that the ongoing efforts and cooperation between Kuwait and Iraq will bring closure to the matter of missing men, women and children as soon as possible.

While South Africa acknowledges the important role the Council can play in addressing this phenomenon, especially by addressing the root causes of conflict situations, which give rise to missing persons, we would like to emphasise that the primary responsibility resides with States themselves. States must ensure that the people within their respective borders are accounted for and protected; that records of prisoners of war are well kept; and that the graves of those who have died are preserved and properly marked. Modern technology can assist us in accurately identifying mortal remains, especially those in the unmarked graves that dominate the landscape of conflict areas.

We take this opportunity to welcome the positive role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross in assisting national actors, where needed, to locate missing persons and to provide support on related matters in addressing this disturbing phenomenon, including by communicating with families of missing persons, where possible.

We are deeply concerned by the rise of incidences of missing persons in armed conflict. The impact of this problem extends beyond the victims themselves and has a lasting and prolonged impact on the affected families and communities. We must also take note that, in situations of armed conflict and in the context of missing persons, those who are most vulnerable — particularly women, children, the elderly and displaced persons — are most affected. The uncertainty surrounding missing persons is deeply traumatic and requires the due attention of national authorities, regional mechanisms and the broader international community. South Africa believes that international cooperation on this matter is indispensable, especially in terms of technical development and cooperation, which may assist in locating missing persons.

Drawing from our own experience, South Africa would like to underscore the important role of truth, justice, reconciliation and accountability in

consolidating peace gains and achieving sustainable peace. In this connection, we wish to highlight the importance of addressing the repatriation of mortal remains to their own countries of origin. This would assist in the healing process and in finding closure for the affected families and communities. We believe that, as a matter related to the protection of civilians, the issue of missing persons suffers from the same problems relating to the lack of implementation of international humanitarian law.

At this juncture, we wish to highlight the prominence of the respective provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1949, the seventieth anniversary of which we are celebrating this year, in guiding the responsibilities of States and parties during armed conflict. In this regard, we would like to emphasise the importance of accountability mechanisms that focus on building national and regional capacities. The sooner we account fully for all missing persons in all armed conflicts, the sooner we will be able to find closure and heal the wounds inflicted by conflict, and the sooner lasting peace will prevail.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to welcome you, Mr. President, to preside over the Security Council today. I would also like to thank you for convening this meeting on the important issue of missing persons in armed conflict.

I wish to thank Ms. Reena Ghelani and Mr. Peter Maurer for their briefings. As they highlighted earlier, this issue has a legitimate place on the Council's agenda. Indeed, the impact of disappearances on individuals, families and communities is one of the most devastating and persistent consequences of armed conflict. Uncertainty and the search for answers can span several generations, marking the history of entire communities and even running the risk of generating new conflicts.

Providing an adequate response to these challenges has a profound impact on our ability to create lasting stability and peace in post-conflict contexts. In Belgium's view, this response is based on three elements: first, prevention and the early management of cases of disappearance; secondly, the fight against impunity; and thirdly, international cooperation.

First, the prevention and early management of cases of disappearance is, of course, in the interest not only of individuals and their families, but also of States.

Without timely action, the work required to search for missing persons is doubled, as is the suffering of the families waiting for answers. It is important to understand what prevention means in practice, and we are pleased that resolution 2474 (2019), adopted today, outlines several concrete measures. These include the registration of detainees, the facilitation of information exchange among separated family members, information-gathering on missing or deceased persons, the mapping of burial sites and graves and the appropriate handling of human remains for identification. These are often measures that are fairly simple but can have an enormous impact if implemented early in a conflict situation. Taking steps such as these means limiting human suffering, preserving the fabric of society and helping reduce feelings of resentment that could give rise to new tensions.

This brings me to my second point. Many of these examples fall within the provisions of humanitarian law and human rights aimed at preventing the disappearance of persons and addressing the consequences of their disappearance. Failure to comply with these obligations cannot be ignored.

Enforced disappearances, be it in a situation of armed conflict or not, are unacceptable and may constitute crimes against humanity. In this context, Belgium welcomes the work of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and calls on States to accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and to implement it in their national legislation. This international legal framework regulates States' obligations, including prosecuting and punishing perpetrators of forced disappearances and compensating the victims and their families. We believe that no effort to bring about reconciliation or peace can succeed when entire families are abandoned and given no information about the fate of their missing loved ones and with no prospect of reparation, leaving impunity to reign undeterred.

Thirdly and finally, I would like to stress the importance of international cooperation in preventing disappearances and addressing their consequences. We must not only coordinate and exchange specific information on missing persons but also share experiences among the existing mechanisms. In that context, we naturally commend the tireless work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Central Tracing Agency. Belgium especially

encourages the ICRC's Missing Persons Project initiative, because it is specifically aimed at ensuring that information, advice and experience are more effectively shared and at developing technical standards that can benefit all States and actors concerned.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on convening this meeting and submitting the resolution that we had the honour to sponsor. Its adoption by consensus reflects the international consensus on the humanitarian issue of missing persons, which remains a global challenge and requires a coherent response.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening and presiding over today's briefing. We also thank Mr. Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for participating today, and we commend their teams for their critical work in addressing the global challenge of missing persons. The ICRC has brought a much-needed international spotlight to the issue in recent years.

All too often, we hear stories of people going missing in times of armed conflict, including notably in the Balkans and Kuwait, and most recently in Iraq and Syria. As we have heard from other speakers, after eight years of conflict many thousands of Syrian civilians are still missing, the vast majority of them, we believe, forcibly disappeared by the Al-Assad regime. Those who are still unjustly detained in Syria must be released. Their families deserve information from the regime about the fate of their loved ones. Taking such basic humane steps would be helpful in building the foundation necessary for a successful political process in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Since 2005, the United States has consistently funded efforts to support the identification, security and excavation of mass graves in Iraq, as our colleague from the United Kingdom noted. More than 6,000 Yazidis were kidnapped by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) in 2014, of whom approximately 3,000 remain unaccounted for, along with hundreds of Christians and Shia Muslims. We strongly support the International Commission on Missing Persons in providing training to Iraqi ministries in the scientific investigation of mass graves and providing support to victims' families. The United States also supports

the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in collecting, storing, and preserving evidence of atrocities carried out by ISIS. We recently committed \$2 million in support of its first exhumations, in Sinjar.

More than 20 years after the war in the Balkans, approximately 10,000 people there are still missing, a figure that should give us all pause. We welcome the partnership between the ICRC and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals to support the humanitarian search for missing persons in the former Yugoslavia.

Kuwait's own experience regarding the whereabouts and fate of its own missing persons is one that none of us should forget. Nearly 28 years have passed since the end of the first Gulf War, but it remains important to address the issue and bring some measure of closure to the families of those still missing. The United States is working diligently to provide satellite imagery to assist in the identification of remains from the conflict.

Families separated by conflict may face the anguish of not knowing what happened to their loved ones, and that pain can prevent surviving relatives from grieving, reconciling, and recovering. The uncertainty also negatively affects a society's ability to seek justice and reconciliation. Joint efforts to address the outstanding issue of missing persons by Kuwait and Iraq together exemplify how countries can emerge from conflict to work in a spirit of cooperation and friendship. It is an example that the international community should applaud as a positive step towards justice and reconciliation.

As today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), with its 62 co-sponsors, makes clear, all the parties to an armed conflict should enable families to clarify the fate and whereabouts of the missing, including prisoners of war. In an illustration of our own national commitment to addressing this critical issue, the United States Department of Defense has established the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Agency. Its purpose is to fulfil a national promise to provide the fullest possible accounting for our missing United States personnel to their families and our fellow citizens.

While it is clear that much work remains to be done to bring closure to the families of missing persons around the world, we remain committed to participating in that

and partnering with the ICRC and others to do what we can to support humanitarian efforts to recover remains.

It is essential to account for the missing so that families can have some certainty about the fate of their loved ones. Today's adoption marks the Council's first collective call to address this global humanitarian priority. Let us now turn our words into actions together.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this important meeting and Kuwait's commitment, Mr. President, exemplified by your presence here today, to promoting the critical issue of missing persons in armed conflict. I would also like to thank Ms. Ghelani and Mr. Maurer for their briefings. We particularly applaud the Council's adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), submitted by your country, Mr. President, through which we are taking a definite step forward in comprehensively addressing the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict, in this case that of missing persons and the impact that the problem has on their families and communities.

We welcome the resolution's operational focus as a concrete step towards prevention and early action in dealing with the issue of missing persons as a path to lasting stability, reconciliation, security and peace. However, we still believe that there is room for the Council to continue to fine-tune its approach to the issue, and we regret that nowhere does the resolution explicitly state that families have the right to know the whereabouts of their missing loved ones, whether civilians or combatants, in situations resulting from armed conflict. Not knowing whether they are alive or dead creates wounds for the families of the missing that are difficult to heal. It leads to unrest and can end up jeopardizing the reconciliation that must follow after peace has been achieved. For the Dominican Republic, the right of families to know the whereabouts of their missing relatives must therefore be fully respected by all parties to the conflict. That requires preventive work and early actions such as registering detainees, facilitating the exchange of news within separated families and ensuring the appropriate and dignified treatment of human remains. That right is particularly important for women, children and the elderly, who are more vulnerable in the face of this kind of uncertainty, and for whom ignoring their specific needs can perpetuate feelings of resentment and exclusion for decades and in turn lead to new violence.

We applaud the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and its Central Tracing Agency to address the hundreds of thousands of cases of missing persons. We encourage States to collaborate closely with them in order to honour their commitments under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, with a view to offering families long-awaited information about loved ones who have disappeared.

There are considerable gaps in States' implementation of their obligations concerning disappeared persons, from the perspective of the protection of civilians and within the framework of international humanitarian law and human rights. Above all, all parties must take every measure necessary to avoid attacks on densely populated areas and civilian infrastructure, which helps to prevent people's death or disappearance, and we must continue to emphasize that. Tragically, however, civilians lead the death statistics in conflicts today, as we continue to see in Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, to mention just a few places. In view of that unfortunate situation, the parties to conflict must take every possible measure to clarify the fate of disappeared persons and provide their families with all the information available on the fate of their relatives, respect the remains of the deceased and where possible return remains to their relatives. Procedures for the exhumation, identification and repatriation of remains, and for the tracing of unmarked graves, must be systematized.

In that regard, we believe that national and regional measures that promote cooperation, training, the exchange of good practices and relevant information on missing persons are still areas where there is much to be done and where more progress is needed to address the issue of the hundreds of thousands of disappeared people all over the world. We are of the view that the families of disappeared persons, as well as civil-society organizations and academia, can and should play a constructive and significant role in establishing mechanisms and national legal frameworks to respond to their needs. Confidence-building is essential. It is therefore necessary to support families by creating spaces where they can be provided with credible and concrete information about the fate of their relatives, including the circumstances and causes of their disappearance or death and possible arrangements for their return. Psychological, legal, economic and protective support for family members who remain in

the dark about the whereabouts of their loved ones is particularly essential to the healing and reconciliation process. For the Dominican Republic, access to justice, accountability and the fight against impunity are as important or even more so in that context.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize how essential it is to ensure that the step forward we have made today is followed by the determined exercise of political will at the local, national and regional levels in order to respond effectively to the issue of missing persons and be able to put into practice the provisions of international humanitarian law and resolution 2474 (2019), which we have just adopted. Collectively and at all levels of the affected societies, we can offer a little hope and a sense of closure to the families that the disappeared leave behind.

Mr. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to welcome you to the Chamber today, Mr. President, and to thank you for your very valuable initiative. I also want to thank our briefers.

Poland welcomes the adoption of resolution 2474 (2019), an important and timely resolution on missing persons in armed conflict. We thank Kuwait for all its efforts to see the text adopted today. We are pleased to be among its sponsors, especially as it focuses on an issue that has long been a global problem, with hundreds of thousands of people missing as a result of armed conflict or violence, whether in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, Colombia, Ukraine or dozens of other countries.

While the exact numbers are difficult to estimate, what we know for certain is that in too many cases of missing persons, families are kept waiting to find out the whereabouts of their relatives, sometimes even for years. Furthermore, as people missing in armed conflicts are also members of various ethnic, religious or other communities, those communities are also kept in uncertainty and left anxious, which often hampers peace and reconciliation efforts, and all of this despite the fact that the international law on the subject is very clear.

First of all, the necessary preventive measures must be put in place well ahead of the outbreak of any conflict, as they are essential for any response to be effective and comprehensive. They must include, among other things, systematic efforts to register persons who are imprisoned, notify their families and collect and centralize information. They must also include the dignified and adequate treatment of the dead by the authorities, as States have the primary responsibility to respect and ensure respect for the human rights of all individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction.

At the same time, in situations where preventive measures have failed, States must do their utmost to trace, locate, identify and return the missing. They can do it individually or collectively with other States and parties to a conflict or other non-State actors, if necessary. In that context I would once again like to thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, not only for their briefings today but for their tireless efforts to offer States and parties to conflicts every kind of support, including on the legal and technical fronts, and to build international recognition of the problem of missing persons and their families, thereby promoting respect for international humanitarian law on the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

The right to justice, followed by effective remedies and accountability measures, is essential to securing long-lasting peace and reconciliation. For that reason, we fully support the resolution adopted today and want to continue to underscore the obligation of all parties to conflicts to respect the principles and norms of international humanitarian law, including by taking all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and providing their family members with any information they have on their fate.

The meeting rose at noon.