

Mr. Morales López (Colombia) (spoke in Spanish): First, let me congratulate you, Madam President, on the excellent conduct of the work of the Security Council during Uruguay's presidency. We welcome the convening of today's open debate and the presidency's concept note (S/2017/365, annex) on the first anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of civilians. The note deals in particular with issues related to medical personnel and health care in the context of armed conflicts at a critical moment in international affairs in relation to humanitarian issues. We thank the Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Deputy Executive Director of Human Rights Watch for their statements.

Over the course of the last few years, we have witnessed the increasing degradation that the prolongation of conflicts has caused for the most vulnerable, such as boys, girls, women and the elderly. However, as stated in the report of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the health system, and medical missions in particular, are increasingly among the first victims of the war. In 2017 alone, more than 80 attacks on medical missions worldwide have been reported.

In that regard, my country shares the concern over the situation being faced by the civilian population in situations of armed conflict in some parts of the world and the recurring failure on behalf of the parties to recognize their obligation to respect and protect civilians. That demands more accountability when these parameters are violated, for that is not only a violation of the guiding principles of international humanitarian law, but also of humanity itself.

The policies of the Government in Colombia are aimed at ensuring that all State and non-State parties in armed conflicts respect their obligations to respect and protect health and humanitarian workers and related facilities, as well as the injured and sick. In that regard, we rely on what we have learned from experiences in the armed conflict that afflicted my country for more than five decades. Our accomplishments include the following.

We have achieved the continuous promotion of the norms of international humanitarian law for health personnel, the community in general and the armed actors. With the ongoing support of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Colombian Red Cross, we have made strides in this effort in many regions of the country. We maintain an updated record of violations against the Medical Mission and are making progress in establishing an observatory mechanism to follow up on those cases. That enabled us to establish corrective measures in terms of security and protection. We are also establishing an appropriate legal framework for dealing with this problem, which has included, for example, an ongoing programme for showing and posting the Medical Mission emblem by the Colombian Ministry of Health among health workers and the community in general.

There is crosscutting work at the national level to promote prevention of and responses to aggression against the Medical Mission, with the participation of universities, the national police, the Office of the General Prosecutor, military forces, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Colombian Red Cross, the National Protection Unit and the Ministry of Labour, among others.

The fulfilment of mandates, including the protection of civilians by the United Nations and other international organizations, should be accompanied by the political will of States. Such mandates include resolution 2286 (2016), which has brought us together today, and the guidelines established by resolution WHA55.13 at the fifty-fifth World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization. That resolution urges member States to vigorously promote and adopt relevant standards of international humanitarian law, to condemn attacks on health-care workers in humanitarian or health areas and to promote actions that ensure the security of

health-care workers. Colombia has been implementing those mandates for many years. States' capacity for compliance must be encouraged by the international community, and any violation should be explained and the object of an impartial investigation.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance that Colombia attaches to the fact that the United Nations fully recognizes the work that national Governments are carrying out in the area of the protection of civilians. To that end, it needs objective, balanced and impartial information, which should include the identification of shortcomings and challenges, but also recognize the progress made in each country. We believe without a doubt that the United Nations should continue to promote respect for international humanitarian law. In our view, this effort will lead to the effective protection of medical personnel and, to the extent possible, to a humanization of conflicts.