

**Mr. Mawe (Ireland):** I thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate. Ireland aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the Human Security Network.

In my national capacity, I wish to situate my brief remarks in the broader context of sustaining peace. The Security Council and, indeed, the entire United Nations system was established not to mitigate the effects of conflict, but to deal with threats and risks to peace in order to prevent them from breaking out into full-scale conflict. We commend Secretary-General Guterres for emphasizing the primacy of peace and for placing conflict prevention at the core of his mandate. We were also glad to see all United Nations Member States come together, with the backing of the Council, to adopt an innovative resolution on sustaining peace in April of last year (General Assembly resolution 70/262). Preventing and ending conflicts must be at the top of our agenda as the most effective means to protect civilians.

Unfortunately, we are compelled to focus on the many conflicts currently being fought. Today, there are more people in conflict-related humanitarian need than we have seen since the end of the Second World War. Much of that is caused not by the mere existence of conflict, but by violations by conflict parties of their duties and obligations — most of which arise from international customary law. Those are not accidents, but deliberate decisions by parties to conflict.

We absolutely condemn attacks on medical and health care facilities. We do so without qualification or reserve. Not only are parties to conflicts reneging on their obligations to ensure, in their military planning and operations, the protection of hospitals and other civilian facilities, they are engaging in deliberate and repeated attacks. We commend the Security Council for responding to that egregious trend by adopting resolution 2286 (2016) in May of last year, which underlines the obligations of parties to armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian and international human rights law to protect health care infrastructure and personnel.

The growing trend of attacks on humanitarian workers is also a cause of grave concern. We heard yesterday in this Chamber (see S/PV.7950) that 17 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan this year alone and we are not yet in the month of June. Moreover, the politicization and militarization of humanitarian aid is unacceptable. Access to food, water and medical care cannot be denied in an attempt by a conflict party to gain military advantage. Similarly, we reject the use of humanitarian access as a bargaining chip in peace negotiations, as well as the attempted tiffor-tat agreements we have seen regarding medical evacuations in Syria.

We support the critical role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which works to coordinate and protect those on the ground who are often putting their lives at risk to access and assist victims of conflict. We thank the ICRC for using its voice to remind States and other parties to armed conflicts of their legal obligations under international humanitarian law, as has been done today by the Vice-President of the ICRC, Ms. Beerli.

Ireland wishes to direct the Council's attention also to the issue of civilian harm from the conduct of hostilities in urban areas, particularly through the use of cluster munitions. Last year, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 92 per cent of those killed and injured were civilians. The immediate effects are clear; we have heard accounts in this Chamber of the destructive aftermath in cities in Yemen, Syria and many other places. What we often do not hear about is the longer-term effect — the stagnation of economic, social and environmental development, or the harm and injury caused by explosive remnants long after the initial conflict has ceased.

We therefore support the recommendation of the Secretary-General for States to engage constructively in efforts to develop a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We also urge all States to accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Arms Trade Treaty. Illegal and irresponsible arms transfers to conflict regions must be stopped.

Finally, when discussing the issue of the protection of civilians we must also highlight the particular challenges faced by women and children. Ireland is supporting a civil society-led study to explore the specific risks faced by women and girls following forced displacement caused by explosive weapons in populated areas.

Let us be clear. We are making lowest common denominator calls today. We are asking that States and non-State actors alike adhere to the rules and norms that bind them to protecting civilians who have nothing to do with the conflict happening around them. As we have seen today in the Secretary-General's report, this is simply not happening. What is more, perpetrators are not being held accountable. If the Organization and the Council are to remain effective and relevant they must take the measures necessary to ensure that everyone adheres to the most basic threshold of humanity.