

**Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom):** I thank you, Sir, for holding today's debate and ensuring that this Chamber hears the voices from civil society and your own statement. It is quite rare to get a round of applause from this audience. I also thank the Secretary-General and to the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch for their excellent contributions. I pay tribute to them and their teams' work.

The United Nations Charter is clear. Protecting civilians is supposed to be at the heart of what we do. When Governments fail to protect, people look to the Security Council for safety from the scourge of war. But for civilians in Syria, South Sudan and so many other places, this is not about words in the Charter or a debate held once a year; it is a horrific daily reality. The sheer scale of the need is unprecedented. The year 2016 saw record numbers of people needing assistance and protection, so many of them victims of conflict and of the flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, so many of them becoming victims of sexual violence, trafficking or other forms of slavery.

As our briefers make clear, that suffering has been made worse through cruel, unconscionable attacks on medical facilities. Look at the fall of Aleppo last year: time and again the regime and its backers bombed that city until all the hospitals were out of action, so that the city could not even care for its injured. Sadly, the trend is spreading. As the Secretary-General pointed out, the urbanization of conflict in Aleppo, Mosul and Juba has increased the risk of destruction of hospitals, schools, water systems and power supplies. This cannot become the new reality of warfare.

Fifteen years on from the Council's first formal commitment to protecting civilians in armed conflict, it is clear that we need a new approach. I therefore welcome the Secretary-General's call to reinvigorate a global campaign, which should take practical steps to minimize civilian harm, protect those that are displaced, ensure peacekeepers perform their best and deliver accountability for those who flout compliance with international law. In support, we should all do four things.

First, we need to take practical steps to mitigate impacts on the ground. For instance, work is ongoing to fortify health-care facilities in Syria and to provide access to mobile clinics in Yemen. In South Sudan, United Kingdom peacekeepers are helping strengthen the security and accessibility of United Nations protection-of-civilians sites.

Secondly, we should share best practices. That means the full participation of women in efforts to protect civilians. It also means full compliance with international humanitarian law by all. In the United Kingdom, we train our military on international humanitarian law throughout their careers, including with country-specific courses before they deploy. We are sharing our expertise to help other Governments and their armed forces comply with international humanitarian law and we are helping them to make their military-justice systems more effective.

Thirdly, we need to collect better and more systematic data on attacks on medical facilities and personnel. We support the Secretary-General's commitment to do this within the United Nations system, but it is not enough to collect data; we need to use it. We therefore call for more Council briefings from the whole United Nations family, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict whenever attacks on medical facilities and personnel occur.

Finally, the Council needs to take action when violations occur. When States fail to act, it is our responsibility to decide that these abuses will not be tolerated, that we will hold those responsible accountable. In this Chamber, we have a duty to shine a light on those who fail to

comply with international law. We have a duty to collect the evidence that is so essential for timely legal action against those who attack medical personnel and facilities in violation of international humanitarian law.

But we are not fulfilling that duty, not yet. So, today, let us all recommit to using the Council's authority, shouldering our responsibility to prevent conflict, to protect civilians and to hold to account those who violate international humanitarian law and those who violate and abuse human rights. The United Kingdom will continue to show leadership, including as part of the Secretary-General's global campaign.