

**Ms. Bird (Australia):** Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's focus on prevention. It is undoubtedly the best long-term strategy for protecting civilians. However, where such efforts fail, the protection of civilians must remain our highest priority. The reason is obvious. Already in 2017, we have witnessed frequent, direct, as well as indiscriminate, attacks against civilians. We have witnessed the arbitrary denial of consent to humanitarian access. We have witnessed utter contempt for human rights. We have witnessed such behaviour in conflicts around the world, including in South Sudan and Yemen, but most especially in Syria.

In line with what others have said today, Australia is particularly alarmed by the frequency, severity and deliberate nature of attacks against health care. Today's briefers, like those who have presented before them, have painted a heart breaking picture of realities on the ground and have provided dire warnings about the risks of failing to implement resolution 2286 (2016) in full. For that reason, we commit to doing our part to translate resolution 2286 (2016) from rhetoric into action.

We applaud the Secretary-General's statement that he will facilitate a global effort to mobilize Member States, civil society and other stakeholders in order to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. We are in full agreement that that must, as a priority, include responding to serious violations, including by holding perpetrators to account.

For good reason, the scorecard of the United Nations on the protection of civilians is one of the litmus tests of the Organization's effectiveness and, frankly, its credibility. Australia therefore expects the members of this Council to support timely and decisive action aimed at preventing or ending the commission of mass atrocities, consistent with the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group's Code of Conduct, as well as with the French and Mexican initiative on veto restraint.

United Nations peacekeeping operations that have been given a protection mandate must prioritize implementation. Despite the significant growth of the protection-of-civilians doctrine and guidance, performance across peacekeeping operations remains mixed. The High-Level Panel on Peace Operations emphasised that protection mandates must be a mission-wide task that utilizes every tool at a given mission's disposal, including non-traditional strategies, such as unarmed civilian protection. The Independent Special Investigation into South Sudan stressed the importance of a forward-leaning, highly mobile posture, including conducting robust, dismounted, day-and-night patrolling. All peacekeepers must be empowered and supported by both the United Nations and the troop- and police-contributing countries to act in accordance with their protection responsibilities.

To assist in such efforts, Australia has provided support to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to disseminate guidelines and policies on the protection of civilians. We have also endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which we consider provide useful guidance to peacekeepers.

In closing, let me pay tribute to those in the field trying to provide protection to civilians, often at great risk to themselves. Together with those whom they are trying to protect, those brave men and women deserve, at the very least, our respect and protection.