

Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni (Sweden): I thank you, Sir, for organizing today's debate.

(spoke in Spanish)

I also thank you for the enthusiasm with which you presented your views.

(spoke in English)

I should also like to thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy of Human Rights Watch, for their important and inspiring contributions.

Sweden fully endorses the statements that will be made later today on behalf of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Nordic Countries by the representative of Norway.

The Fourth Geneva Convention puts the protection of civilians at the heart of international humanitarian law. The Charter of the United Nations puts it at the heart of the mandate and responsibility of the Security Council. Sadly, despite those protections, one might say that it has never been as perilous as it is today to be a civilian in the middle of armed conflict. It has been forty years since the adoption of the Additional Protocols of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions, which specifically strengthen the protection of civilians. Yet, almost every day, the Council is faced with testimonies to the most brutal, barbarous and premeditated instances of the targeting of civilians as a tactic of war.

From the atrocities in Syria and in the inaccessible villages of Borno State in northern Nigeria and the man-made famine ravaging South Sudan to the crisis in Yemen and the attacks on medical facilities in Kunduz in Afghanistan, the Secretary-General and the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross rightly speak of a global protection crisis. The current level of preventable suffering is horrifying, and, as we have stated repeatedly, utterly unacceptable.

It is incontrovertible that States have the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. At the same time, the international community, including the Council, must do more. We welcome the Secretary-General's proposed path to protection and his recommendations for a more ambitious approach for the United Nations across the board. The path to protection is strongly linked to the Secretary-General's prevention agenda. Such an approach saves lives and prevents suffering. It also has the potential to save billions of dollars in humanitarian aid, which can, in turn, be invested in building stable and prosperous societies.

Once a year, we meet here to speak about the protection of civilians in an open debate. Every day, however, we address those issues in our work. It is our responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians in each and every conflict, but often we fail. How can we do better? The protection of civilians' agenda is broad. Today, I will limit myself to focusing on three issues.

First, we can ensure respect for international humanitarian law, as well as international human rights law. Where once civilian deaths were seen as the unavoidable accidental casualties of war, we now see civilians being actively targeted. Deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are seen as just another tool in the toolbox of warfare. We fully agree with the Secretary-General that the narrative that civilian deaths in war are inevitable must be reversed. In fact, such deaths can be prevented.

International humanitarian law provides a foundation for prevention, as well as for reconciliation, peacebuilding and accountability. The protection and promotion of human rights contributes to addressing the root causes of instability. We can include a gender perspective in the implementation of international humanitarian law. It would ensure that all civilians —

both men and women — get the effective protection to which they are entitled, as well as impartial humanitarian assistance. Women and girls face heightened and specific risks in situations of armed conflict. It is, therefore, important that the situation and needs of women and girls in armed conflict be addressed. Furthermore, the particular vulnerabilities and protection needs of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons — especially children — need to be recognized, considered and addressed.

Secondly, we can take concrete steps forward by building upon landmark resolution 2286 (2016) and the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General of August 2016 (S/2016/360). The legal and policy framework for protecting the sick and wounded and those endeavouring to assist them is in place. Sweden is ready to engage. My Government's ministerial delegation on international law and disarmament is in the process of developing new and concrete proposals to strengthen the protection of medical care in armed conflict.

Thirdly, with regard to peacekeeping, we can ensure that cross-pillar political strategies guide all peace operations. The protection of civilians cannot be seen as optional. It must be politically prioritized within those strategies, properly resourced and integrated across the work of missions. That requires the availability to the Council of relevant and accurate information with respect to the protection of civilians, which, we believe, should be included in reporting by the Secretary-General and other mechanisms, while drawing on the whole of the United Nations system.

Missions have a critical role in ensuring that protection needs are identified, reported and addressed. Women's participation must be ensured at all stages of protection strategies in order to ensure that those strategies address the needs of the entire population. Building the capacity of United Nations troops and police, including in the protection of citizens, is part of a larger peacekeeping reform that must be sustained.

Finally, as the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we would also like to highlight the fact that the Security Council's children and armed conflict agenda has an important accountability mechanism for dealing with the perpetrators of attacks on schools and hospitals. That includes its monitoring and reporting mechanism, namely, the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict with its annexes, which list the perpetrators of such attacks and United Nations action plans concluded to end such violations. In order to address the widespread impunity for attacks on health care, we can fully utilize that mechanism.

We have made much progress on the protection of civilians within the Council and within the work of the United Nations more broadly. The legal framework is there; the resolutions have been adopted and agreed. We must now start down the path of protection that reinforces respect for international humanitarian law, while working to prevent and end conflict. Doing so will require the full commitment and strong leadership of both the Secretary-General and the Security Council.