

Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians

Statement delivered by
H. E. Mr. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland

I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of members of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Uruguay. The Group of Friends thanks the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate, keeping PoC high on the agenda. We also thank today's briefers for their statements.

It is right that the Protection of Civilians is discussed by the Council on a regular basis, to reaffirm the necessity for full respect and implementation of the norms and principles related to the protection of civilians as enshrined in IHL, human rights and refugee law as well as in international criminal law. Parties to armed conflict must be reminded time and again that even wars have rules, and that these rules apply to all. We continue to call on the Security Council to systematically uphold core PoC standards. The latest report of the UN Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians clearly indicates that the situation is worsening in a number of areas. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians are widespread in many contemporary conflicts. Schools and medical personnel and facilities are regularly and increasingly targeted. Access restrictions for humanitarian workers impede the delivery of assistance. A growing number of parties to armed conflicts openly disregard long-established rules of international humanitarian law, especially with regard to the conduct of hostilities or persons no longer taking part in hostilities.

In this context, the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 on healthcare in armed conflict and the protection of medical personnel and facilities by this Council, with a large number of co-sponsors, sends an important signal: despite the numerous violations observed in recent years, international law is clear. The wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities must be respected and protected.

At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, state, civil society and humanitarian leaders consistently asserted that international humanitarian, human rights law and refugee law are more relevant than ever. Global leaders announced significant commitments to enhance compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law through a spectrum of concrete measures.

Turning to peacekeeping operations, we want to stress that protecting the civilian population and persons who are no longer taking part in hostilities is not just another task of the UN - it is seen by many as the essence of the UN.

The implementation of the recommendations emanating from the peace operations review presents a key opportunity. The review highlights the tools to enable UN peacekeeping missions to leverage all their components to effectively protect civilians. Such a mission-wide task requires a solid foundation in the form of clear and pragmatic mandates that reflect what is feasible on the ground. A whole-of mission approach to PoC is essential. Mission leadership can play an essential role and the civilian and police components of missions can contribute to protecting civilians just as much as the military components, depending on the situation. Political engagement and support for political settlements

should be seen as an integral part to this effort. The best way to protect civilians is by preventing armed conflict in the first instance and when this fails, by ending armed conflicts through a negotiated and inclusive settlement. We also believe that establishing accountability is central to making progress on protecting issues and in this regard welcome the fact that missions like MINUSMA and MINUSCA are tasked to support the fight against impunity and the work of the International Criminal Court.

We further believe that tailored mission planning is crucial for the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. In this context, we see great potential for a phased mandating process that ensures a sound alignment between the needs on the ground and available resources along with a systematic review of mandates after an initial period, in close consultation with troop and police contributing countries. We also see benefits in mandates that give clear guidelines on the distribution of tasks. In this context we welcome the establishment of Senior PoC Advisers and comprehensive PoC strategies in all missions with a PoC mandate. Such approaches pave the way for close cooperation with all actors involved, and further development of best practices and approaches, that are tailor-made for specific contexts. Enhanced conflict analysis is also necessary for mission planning and in this regard we welcome the SG's decision to revise existing conflict analysis methodologies and to set-up a centralized analysis and planning capacity in the Secretary-General's office. Further, PoC must be an integral part of the pre-deployment training for both uniformed and civilian personnel. A fundamental understanding of the linkages between protecting civilians and compliance with the rules of IHL and human rights law is a prerequisite.

A coherent approach across the UN system is fundamental for efficient cooperation between the UN and local actors, non-governmental

organizations as well as regional and other international organizations. Let us also not forget that there are pressing protection challenges in several conflicts – including in situations on the Council’s agenda - where there are currently no peacekeeping operations, and that these also have to be addressed.

A gender perspective is a key component of effective protection. Field-based UN missions must reach out to women and girls, not only to ensure that their specific needs are taken into account, but also to realize their full potential and engage them as protectors.

The group of friends also takes note of the “Kigali Principles on Protection of Civilians”, currently endorsed by 30 countries,, aiming at reinforcing the protection of civilians by TCCs and PCCs in the framework of peacekeeping operations.

Finally, missions can only succeed if both uniformed and civilian personnel act in the spirit of the mandate as well as of the United Nations’ overarching goals. Repeated incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN representatives in peacekeeping missions have painfully reminded us how devastating the effect of a few individuals can be on an entire organization and on the lives of those they should be protecting. We therefore welcome the zero tolerance policy implemented by the Secretary-General.