

**A3 JOINT STATEMENT ON THE UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON THE PROTECTION
OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT**

May 23, 2019

Madame President,

On behalf of the African members of the Security Council, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa, I would like to thank the Indonesian Presidency for organizing this important Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

We would like to thank Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations and the distinguished briefers for their comprehensive presentations, which undoubtedly underscores that civilians not only continue to account for the vast majority of casualties during conflict, but also bear the brunt of the short and long term impacts of conflict, from the denial of and attacks to humanitarian assistance to all forms of violence and forced displacement.

Madame President,

This debate is timely as 2019 marks the 70th Anniversary of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, a cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law, and the 20th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Resolutions 1265 and 1270 (1999). These landmark components of International Law have framed the United Nation's approach to the protection of civilians in the contemporary age, however, the implementation of these legal frameworks is still lacking.

While we have seen significant improvement in the compliance of state actors with these provisions, the changing nature of modern conflicts shifting from inter-state conflicts to civil wars, trans-national conflicts and instability has meant that the protection of civilians has become more and more challenging.

Nevertheless, while recalling the respect to sovereignty, territorial integrity of States, and recognizing the leadership role of the States in protecting, nurturing and advancing the protection of civilians' agenda, we would like to acknowledge the important role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as the custodian for International Humanitarian Law, in attempting to regulate the conduct of armed conflict in order to protect the most vulnerable caught in the middle of such conflicts. We would further like to acknowledge the significant role the Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) plays by working with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to mitigate and respond to civilian harm.

Madame President,

The role of the United Nations Security Council in pursuance of International Humanitarian Law is to take decisive action to facilitate the necessary environment, such as humanitarian corridors, ceasefires, and the development of peacekeepers with robust protection of civilians' mandates. These actions are necessary to create the conditions for sustainable action on peace and security, humanitarian and development nexus to thrive.

Furthermore, greater coordination and cooperation between the UN and regional organizations, such as the African Union, is necessary to create an environment that would enable the protection of civilians. The comparative advantage of regional organizations can enable closer collaboration and coordination with local communities, including creating the necessary environment for the return of refugees, and internally displaced persons on a voluntary basis in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement.

Protection of civilians requires not only physical protection, but also to liaise and engage with communities to ensure that the necessary environment is created to facilitate long-term protection mechanisms. In this regard, we believe that the strength of the multidimensional nature of Peacekeeping Missions is paramount in creating proactive approaches to protecting civilians through military engagements, and also consolidating the gains made in permanently eliminating the threats to innocent populations.

Madame President,

Nevertheless, we wish to underline that, whilst it remains the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians, including humanitarian personnel and health workers within their borders, all parties including armed opposition groups must also bear the responsibility for ensuring that civilians and health workers are protected. All parties to a conflict should fully comply with their obligations under International Law, as stated in Resolution 2286 (2016).

It is also important to highlight that protection of civilians is a multidisciplinary agenda. It includes contributing activities of the UN, Regional Organizations such as the AU, International Organizations such as the ICRC, Non-Governmental Organizations, the Military Component, the Civilian Component, and the Host Government and Host Government security forces. Efforts to address the Protection of Civilians agenda, therefore, need to involve close coordination by all role players.

It is also important to note that, among the civilian population, vulnerable groups such as women and children are mostly affected. Therefore, we call for the full implementation of provisions of Resolution 1325 (2000) and 2427 (2018) as well as subsequent resolutions, particularly with regard to the protection of women and children in armed conflict. This also requires the strengthening and mainstreaming of special provisions and personnel within peacekeeping missions to ensure that these groups are adequately protected.

Madame President,

In order to deter the threats to civilians and foster greater compliance with International Humanitarian Law, we believe that the necessary accountability mechanisms, and the policy space and technical support to develop them, are essential. These include local, national and regional accountability mechanisms. Broader international mechanisms should continue to assist these, based on complementarity and subsidiarity. However, the most effective ways to protect civilians are to prevent armed conflict through investments in sustainable development and to promote the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts and consolidating peace through focusing on the post-conflict environment and peacebuilding, a responsibility charged to this Council.

This Council often finds itself hamstrung from acting based on competing geopolitical interests that we are deeply concerned about. Nothing should prevent the Council from acting decisively when it comes to protecting those caught in the middle of armed conflicts. The protection of civilians should remain a priority and requires firm commitment from this Council.

Thank you.