

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

1. 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, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Uruguay. The Group of Friends thanks the Polish Presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate. We also thank today's briefers for their statements.
2. It is of paramount importance that PoC be discussed by the Council on a regular basis, to advance the full respect and implementation of the norms related to the protection of civilians as enshrined in international humanitarian law (IHL), human rights and international refugee law as well as in international criminal law. PoC is a key aspect of the maintenance of peace and security, and we call on the Council to systematically uphold and include core PoC standards in its deliberations and decisions, consistently and throughout the Council agenda.
3. This is more necessary now than ever, as the latest Report of the UN Secretary-General on PoC clearly indicates widespread violations of IHL and worrying trends in a number of areas. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects, including medical facilities and schools, occur with appalling frequency in many contemporary conflicts. In some cases, the wounded and sick as well as medical personnel are intentionally attacked. Detainees are treated inhumanely. Impartial humanitarian actors continue to face widespread and persistent humanitarian access constraints. Millions of civilians are forced from their homes to a perilous fate where they face heightened protection and assistance needs. Countless others are missing, with insufficient attention provided by States to clarify their fate and to inform the next of kin of their whereabouts. The trend of urbanization of conflicts continues to develop, with its particularly acute impact on civilians and civilian objects, in particular due to the indiscriminate use of weapons, particularly in densely populated areas. Children are often the ones to suffer the most devastating effects from conflicts, and this is why unlawful attacks directed against schools must be condemned in the strongest terms, taking note in this regard of the Safe School Declaration. The starvation of the civilian population and their besiegement are being increasingly used as methods of warfare. On this last issue, we welcome the ongoing discussions in the context of the Assembly of States to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) regarding a proposal to amend the current legal accountability framework.
4. Recognizing the heavy civilian toll of today's conflicts should not come to the detriment of highlighting progress and identifying avenues for action. Let us learn from the benefits of compliance with norms and principles of humanity and from positive examples. Let us be ambitious in regard to protection. It is within this context that the Group of Friends would like to stress the following five priorities :
5. First, enhancing respect for IHL is absolutely crucial. We are all called upon to ensure respect for IHL through the Geneva Conventions. Armed conflicts are regulated by specific rules, which include those governing the conduct of hostilities, providing for humanitarian access and protecting the wounded and sick, including the provision of medical care to the enemy. In view of widespread violations, we call on the Council and Member States to uphold their responsibilities in this regard, notably by supporting the Geneva-based intergovernmental process on strengthening respect for international humanitarian law.
6. Second and consequently, ensuring accountability for violations of IHL is of paramount importance to demonstrate to actual or potential perpetrators that violations do not go unpunished and to deliver justice to victims. We welcome national-level investigations and prosecutions. In line with the principle of complementarity to national jurisdictions, when such national systems are unable or unwilling to act, accountability should be ensured through existing international investigative and judicial mechanisms. We call on all States to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC and to fully cooperate with the ICC.
7. Third, the implementation of resolution 2286 on the protection of healthcare in armed conflict must remain a priority. In this regard, we welcome recent initiatives by member States and organizations dedicated to mobilizing political leadership, encouraging the exchange of good

practice and fostering implementation at all levels, in particular the establishment in Geneva of an informal group of support to 2286.

8. Fourth, UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions play a vital role in supporting the transition from conflict to peace in some of the most fragile regions in the world and we would like to thank all of those who contribute to such endeavors, especially TCC's/PCC's. The destabilising effects of such conflicts, particularly the violence and displacement that they produce, often leave civilian populations vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses. Peacekeeping missions contribute to reducing that threat, and protection of civilians activities, including those carried out by the civilian component of missions, are rightly at the heart of their objectives, taking note of the Kigali Principles. Protection of civilians is a core obligation of the United Nations, but expectations and capability must converge. We therefore encourage more focused debates in all bodies responsible for Peacekeeping Operations and welcome the efforts of the Secretary General to mobilize all partners and stakeholders in support of more effective UN peacekeeping, including through his initiative "Action for Peacekeeping".
9. Fifth and finally, there is a need to dedicate greater attention to the protection of civilians in counter-terrorism contexts. Counter-terrorism measures taken by States must always comply with international humanitarian, human rights, and international refugee law, where applicable. We call on States to ensure that counter-terrorism legislation and measures do not impede humanitarian and medical activities or engagement with all relevant actors as foreseen by international humanitarian law. We also call on the Council and other relevant parties to consistently uphold these principles and consider ways of strengthening protection in counter-terrorism contexts.

Mr. President,

10. Today's armed conflicts are first and foremost protection crises. Prevention must remain a priority. We must follow these avenues for action and build on the initiatives and practical measures highlighted in the Secretary General's report. More must be done to promote the development of national policy frameworks on PoC, to engage with non-State armed groups to enhance PoC, to facilitate exchange on good practice and to ensure compliance with the relevant international laws and accountability for its violation, in a consistent manner. The Group of Friends is committed to do its part and to contribute to global-level advocacy to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

Thank you.