

Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic countries

at the

**General Assembly,
Seventy-third Session**

Sixth Committee

**Agenda item 83:
Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and
relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts**

**United Nations,
New York**

16 October 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

We would like to begin by thanking the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Federation and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the vital work that they carry out every day around the globe, protecting persons in armed conflict and promoting compliance with international humanitarian law.

The Nordic countries would like to welcome the Report of the Secretary-General (A/73/277) on the status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts, and the useful update it provides.

Another recent report by the Secretary-General from May 2018 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict paints a horrendous picture of the state of the protection of the civilians in today's conflicts. Civilians continue to carry the brunt of the consequences of armed conflicts across the globe. Despite the rigorous legal framework in place, we continue to witness an increase in violence and threats directed at civilians and civilian infrastructure.

As the Secretary-General points out, the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent armed conflicts. We need to address root causes, promote human rights and the rule of law as well as strengthen national governance and institutions, in order to prevent conflicts and sustain peace.

Respect for international humanitarian law plays a crucial role for the prevention and termination of armed conflict. There is an imperative need to uphold the norms of international humanitarian law. During the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, all States recognized the need to improve compliance with international humanitarian law and to address the current weaknesses and gaps in the implementation of international humanitarian law, including by non-State parties to armed conflict. In resolution number 2, “Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law”, all States were tasked with identifying concrete ways to strengthen the implementation of international humanitarian law. With one year left to the 33rd Conference, the Nordic countries would like to call on all States to engage constructively in this process and reach consensus on how to fulfill the mandate of resolution number 2. The next conference will be a crucial opportunity to take stock and to reaffirm our determination to live up to our obligations set out by the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions.

Mr. Chairperson,

Every day we see egregious violations of the most basic tenets of international law. We should not need to be reminded that civilians and civilian objects such as schools, humanitarian workers, medical facilities or journalists are not targets. And yet all too often, they are attacked. We need to do better. In today’s ongoing conflicts we continue to witness arbitrary denial of humanitarian access to persons in need and an increase in attacks and threats directed at medical facilities and medical- and humanitarian personnel. It is our obligation to protect those who provide health care and assistance to the wounded and sick, and to implement the relevant rules and principles of international law to this effect. In this regard we welcome the landmark Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016), in which attacks against medical facilities and personnel in conflict situations are strongly condemned.

We commend the heroic efforts by numerous medical and humanitarian personnel in today's conflicts, including by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, who assist persons in need under extremely dangerous circumstances.

We must all ensure non-discriminatory implementation of international humanitarian law. We believe that taking a gender perspective in the implementation of international humanitarian law is a precondition for relevant and effective interventions. This is reiterated in resolution number 3 of the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which rightly states that women's political, social and economic empowerment; gender equality; and the engagement of men and boys in the effort to combat all forms of violence against women are essential to long-term efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict, disasters and other emergencies.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Nordic countries wish to highlight the potential of the International Humanitarian Fact Finding Commission under Article 90 of the First Additional Protocol. This body has the competence to enquire into facts alleged to be grave breaches or serious violations of international humanitarian law, to facilitate through good offices respect for those norms, and to report and make recommendations to the States involved. We should make use of its ability.

Mr Chairperson,

The Nordic countries commend the International Criminal Court's efforts to investigate and prosecute persons suspected of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, it is primarily at the domestic level that persons must be held accountable for their actions.

We must be pro-active when it comes to both compliance with international humanitarian law and accountability for non-compliance. The Nordic countries would therefore like to encourage a discussion on other perspectives on accountability, including the role of universal jurisdiction and ways to strengthen cooperation on bringing forward national prosecutions where possible. We would also like to welcome the use of alternative international mechanisms that promote accountability and to suggest that we strengthen the cooperation between international mechanisms and other actors, including national authorities, judiciaries and NGO's, to bring about justice.

Let us conclude by recalling the urgency to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to end impunity. Accountability and justice are not optional. First and foremost, we must do this for the sake of the victims of crimes, but also for our credibility as States and guardians of international humanitarian law and the rule-based international order.

Thank you.