

**Statement by Sweden on behalf of the Nordic countries  
(Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden)**

**at the**

**General Assembly,  
Seventy-fifth 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**

**4 October 2020**

*– CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –*

Mr./ Madam Chair,

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

The Nordic countries would like to welcome the Report of the Secretary-General (A/75/263) 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. We encourage States to continue to report on the status of the protocols and measures taken to fully implement them at the national level.

Mr./ Madam Chair,

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous human suffering and has made those affected by armed conflict, including those who are displaced or living in refugee camps, even more vulnerable. Delivering humanitarian assistance and creating a space for dialogue in challenging situations is more important than ever. We would like to thank the humanitarian organizations, including 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.

Respect for international humanitarian law saves lives and protects people from the worst consequences of armed conflicts. There is an imperative need to uphold the rules of international humanitarian law. The Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions further strengthens the protection of the victims of war and we call today on those States that have not yet ratified the Additional Protocols to do so.

Mr./ Madam Chair,

A recent report by the Secretary-General from May 2020 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict sets out that international humanitarian law continues to apply and must be respected by all parties to armed conflicts in order to ensure effective protection for conflict-affected populations and an effective response to the pandemic. The report illustrates that the pandemic may exacerbate difficulties in the protection of civilians. While the international community is absorbed by the health crisis caused by the pandemic, some parties to conflict may feel tempted to press their advantage or seek opportunities to attack, which could lead to an increase in civilian suffering. Such a scenario further underlines the need for compliance with international humanitarian law.

The Nordic countries welcome initiatives aiming to increase compliance with the law, such as the implementation reports on the European Union guidelines on the promotion of compliance with international humanitarian law.

During the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2019, the Member States recognized the need to effectively address the current weaknesses and gaps in the implementation of international humanitarian law, including by non-State parties to armed conflict. In the resolution “Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law”, adopted at the Conference, States that have not already done so are encouraged to ratify IHL treaties to which they are not yet parties and to adopt all the necessary legislative, administrative and practical measures to implement international humanitarian law at the national level.

The Nordic countries call on all States to continue to engage constructively in this process towards universal ratification and to reaffirm our determination to live up to our obligations set out by the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions.

Mr./ Madam Chair,

Civilians and civilian objects such as schools, humanitarian workers or medical facilities are too often attacked. We wish to highlight the Secretary General’s call for a universal ceasefire, endorsed by the Security Council, in order to address the pressing issues due to the pandemic. 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 underline the importance of the landmark Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016), in which attacks against medical facilities and personnel in conflict situations are strongly condemned. On this note, we look forward to seeing the result from the Study on the Protection of Health Care by State Armed Forces, conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and it is our expectation that this study will provide concrete, practical ways that armed forces can better protect medical workers and equipment. We encourage everyone to incorporate this guidance into their military operations in order to keep health-care personnel and facilities safe from harm. We are deeply concerned about the under-representation of women in processes and bodies related to humanitarian work, including in senior positions, and the lack of support for women assuming leadership roles in these settings. We believe that an integrated gender perspective in the implementation of international humanitarian law is a precondition for relevant and effective interventions. This is reiterated in resolution “Women and leadership in the humanitarian action of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement” adopted at the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Mr./ Madam Chair,

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.

We also warmly welcome the ICRC updated 2020 Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict to reflect developments in treaty and customary international law. The Nordic countries emphasize the need to limit the damage that armed conflict can have on the natural environment, as such damage may also have serious consequences on the affected populations.

Mr./ Madam Chair,

The Nordic countries commend the International Criminal Court's efforts to investigate and prosecute persons suspected of most serious international crimes. However, it is primarily at the domestic level that persons must be held accountable for their actions. Due to the challenges the Court is currently facing, the Nordic countries would like to express our fullest support to the Court, its staff and its vital work to end impunity for the most serious international crimes.

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 other perspectives on accountability, including the role of universal jurisdiction and ways to strengthen cooperation on bringing forward national prosecutions where possible.

Let us conclude by recalling the obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. Fulfilling this obligation is fundamental in the protection of civilians.

Thank you.