

25. Protection of civilians in armed conflict

During the period under review, the Security Council held one meeting and adopted one resolution in connection with the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The meeting took the form of a briefing.⁹⁰² Council members also held two open videoconferences on this item.⁹⁰³ More information on the meeting, including participants and speakers, as well as on the videoconferences is given respectively in tables 1 and 2 below.

On 27 April 2021, at the initiative of Viet Nam, which held the Presidency for the month, the members of the Council held a high-level open videoconference in connection with this item focused on the topic of the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.⁹⁰⁴ At the high-level videoconference, the Council was briefed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and by the Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Peace Institute.⁹⁰⁵

In their statements, the briefers reported that essential infrastructure and services to the survival of civilians, such as medical facilities, water infrastructure as well as energy systems, continued to be targeted by parties to armed conflict, including non-state armed groups, with effects that were compounded by climate change and environmental degradation, as well as by the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator expressed deep concern on the ability to protect decades of hard-won progress achieved on compliance with international humanitarian law to protect civilians and the objects they relied on to survive, due to the disrespect or undermining of international humanitarian law by both States and non-States armed groups. He expressed concern, *inter alia*, over the direct impact of conflict on food security, including the destruction of stocks and agricultural assets and warned of the looming risk of famine in Yemen, South Sudan, north-east Nigeria and elsewhere

⁹⁰² For more information on the format of meetings, see part II, sect. II.

⁹⁰³ For further details on the procedure and working methods developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, see part II.

⁹⁰⁴ A concept note was circulated by a letter dated 6 April 2021 ([S/2021/335](#)).

⁹⁰⁵ See [S/2021/415](#). For further information on high-level meetings and videoconferences, see part II.

unless urgent action was taken. He also referred to the impact on sanitation and health that damaged water infrastructure and attacks on medical care had caused in areas including Ukraine, Libya, Yemen, the Syrian Arab Republic, and South Sudan. Condemning the use of rape and sexual violence in pursuit of military goals and explosive weapons in populated areas, as well as cyberattacks and the threat they posed to essential infrastructure, the Under-Secretary-General called for enhanced compliance with international humanitarian law and accountability for its serious violations in addition to the prevention of the use of explosive weapons as ways to strengthen the protection of civilians and objects indispensable to their survival.

In his statement, the Director-General of the ICRC warned that without urgent action to protect essential services in conflict zones, there would be a humanitarian disaster of a vast scale. The Director-General said that the Committee was working to prevent critical infrastructure that was “too big to fail” from collapsing, plunging millions into crisis. In that connection, he called on the Council to take action on five specific areas, namely, ensuring that all parties respect international humanitarian law; adopting an “avoidance policy” regarding the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas; ensuring that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures complied with international humanitarian law; adopting measures to ensure health care and interconnected services such as water, sanitation and electricity were protected to safeguard against public health risks; and adopting policies that minimized the impact of military operations on the environment and dependent civilians.

In a similar vein, the Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Peace Institute deplored the fact that both deliberate and inadvertent attacks against vital human infrastructure and the natural environment remained a daily reality and underscored the importance that the Security Council remained seized of it. He focused on the long-term impact of armed conflict on development and peace and provided recommendations for the United Nations on such issues as prevention and the protection of critical infrastructure including through the Secretary-General’s good offices as well as peacekeeping operations and country teams. He also noted that the Secretariat — at the request of the Security Council — could consider systematically monitoring attacks against all types of essential infrastructure and that the United Nations could continue to work with international, regional and national partners to coordinate a holistic approach to rehabilitation and reconstruction. He cautioned, however, that the United Nations could not

successfully promote the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population or support reconstruction without the political will and efforts of its Member States. In that connection, he called on Council members to take the lead in ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, including by upholding their obligation to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

During the discussion that ensued, delegations welcomed Viet Nam's initiative for convening the open debate as well as for a Security Council resolution on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam opened the discussion noting that, while the protection of civilians had been at the forefront of the work of the Council, more often than not, the Council's discussions had focused on protecting the people, with little attention paid to securing the means for their survival. He affirmed that the open debate was therefore a good opportunity for the Council to deliberate on the issue at a thematic level, and that it was critical that the Council developed a comprehensive strategy to effectively protect infrastructure and objects critical for the survival of civilians in armed conflict, based on compliance with international humanitarian law and cooperation. In that regard, he recommended the Council should encourage and facilitate closer coordination between Member States, international organizations and humanitarian and development partners in post-conflict peacebuilding, especially in efforts to rebuild basic infrastructure and restore essential services to civilians. Delegations framed their remarks around the need for compliance with international humanitarian law as well as holding perpetrators accountable as the increasingly complex dynamics of contemporary conflicts and threats continued to evolve. In that connection, several delegations noted that the main challenge was not the lack of existing international norms for protecting civilians in armed conflict, but the lack of implementation and respect of such norms.⁹⁰⁶ More specifically, Member States recalled a number of previously adopted Security Council resolutions on the protection of essential objects for the civilian population, including resolution [2417 \(2018\)](#), which recognized the link between hunger and

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., Estonia, Ireland, India, Mexico, Armenia, Brazil, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan, Switzerland (on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict), and Turkey.

conflict and condemned the use of the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.⁹⁰⁷ In that context, some delegations welcomed the recent amendment to the Rome Statute concerning the war crime of starvation, including in non-international armed conflict and encouraged States parties to ratify it.⁹⁰⁸ Expressing great concern at the widespread and deliberate attacks on medical facilities, humanitarian workers and schools in various conflict areas around the world, a number of speakers also condemned the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas,⁹⁰⁹ with some expressing support for the Irish-led initiative to adopt a political declaration to strengthen the protection of civilians from the impact of explosive weapons in urban areas.⁹¹⁰ In that light, Member States also expressed their grave concern about the widespread and deliberate destruction or damage caused to schools and education infrastructure, with a number of delegations endorsing initiatives such as the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration, and calling on other Members to do the same.⁹¹¹

Furthermore, several Member States drew attention to the increasing number of cyberattacks directed at essential infrastructure, with particular impact on health care, electrical and water systems and causing significant damage, given the unprecedented challenges and vulnerabilities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹¹² In that regard, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia stated that, with the increasing urbanization of armed conflicts, climate change and the environmental consequences of armed conflict, new technologies could help to find ways to improve humanitarian assistance and cybersecurity needed to be part of both conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Some Member States underscored the importance of making effective use of monitoring and reporting mechanisms to inform decision-making processes so as to allow for early and quick responses to any threats.⁹¹³ While some Member

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., Ireland, Norway, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, Guatemala, Italy, Japan, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Sweden (on behalf of the Nordic countries), and Switzerland (on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict).

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., Norway, Austria, European Union, Liechtenstein, Sweden (on behalf of the Nordic countries), and Switzerland (on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict).

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., Ireland, Norway, Armenia, Austria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, European Union, Italy, and Malta.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid., Ireland, Norway, Austria, Costa Rica, Italy, and Malta.

⁹¹¹ Ibid., Norway, Mexico, European Union, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, and Spain.

⁹¹² Ibid., Estonia, Ireland, Norway, China, India, Belgium, Ecuador, El Salvador, Liechtenstein, Malta, and Sweden (on behalf of the Nordic countries).

⁹¹³ Ibid., France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Costa Rica, El Salvador, European Union, Portugal, South Africa and Spain.

States called for the Security Council to continue designating perpetrators for targeted sanctions,⁹¹⁴ others pointed to the harmful effects of unilateral sanctions and ill-designed counter-terrorism measures.⁹¹⁵ In addition, a number of Member States stressed that the effective protection of civilians by peacekeeping missions required well-defined, realistic and achievable mandates as well as adequate resources.⁹¹⁶

At the end of the videoconference, the President announced the unanimous adoption of resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#).⁹¹⁷ By the resolution, the Council, inter alia, strongly condemned, attacks in situations of armed conflicts against civilians and civilian objects, as well as indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks, resulting in the deprivation of the civilian population of objects indispensable to their survival, and demanded that all parties to armed conflict immediately put an end to such practices.⁹¹⁸ The Council also demanded that all parties fully complied with their obligations under international humanitarian law, distinguishing between civilians and combatants and military objects, taking due care to spare the civilian population and civilian objects, refraining from attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to their survival and respecting and protecting humanitarian personnel and consignments used for humanitarian relief operations.⁹¹⁹ By the same resolution, the Council strongly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in a number of armed conflict situations which was prohibited by international law and might constitute a war crime.⁹²⁰ The Council urged all parties to armed conflict to protect civilian infrastructure and reiterated its demand that they engage immediately in a durable humanitarian pause to facilitate safe, unhindered and sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance, including the equitable, safe and unhindered delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccination in areas of armed conflict.⁹²¹ It also encouraged all efforts to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian

⁹¹⁴ Ibid., France, Kenya, United Kingdom, Afghanistan, Belgium, and South Africa.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Iran (Islamic Republic of).

⁹¹⁶ Ibid., India, Kenya, Belgium, Cuba, Egypt, Guatemala, Portugal, and South Africa.

⁹¹⁷ See [S/2021/407](#) and [S/2021/410](#).

⁹¹⁸ Resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#), para. 1.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., paras. 2 and 3.

⁹²⁰ Ibid., para. 4.

⁹²¹ Ibid., paras. 6 and 7.

population and civilian infrastructure critical to enable the delivery of essential services in armed conflict, including by protecting civilians operating, maintaining or repairing these objects, and allowing and facilitating safe passage of equipment, transport and supplies necessary for the reparation, maintenance or operation of such objects.⁹²² Finally, the Council requested the Secretary-General to include a sub-item on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in his reports on the protection of civilians.⁹²³

On 25 May 2021, at the initiative of China, which held the Presidency for the month, the members of the Council held its annual debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict via an open videoconference.⁹²⁴ At the videoconference, members of the Council heard briefings by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and by the Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.⁹²⁵ The briefers focused their remarks on how vulnerable populations around the world continued to bear the brunt of armed conflicts due to the lack of implementation of Council resolutions and international humanitarian law, a situation which had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator briefed the Council on the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.⁹²⁶ He pointed out that despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in 2020 so that the world could focus on ending the pandemic, deadly conflicts had continued in many places and new ones had emerged in others, frustrating the efforts to control the spread of the virus and to care for the infected. Referring to the plight of civilians in the various conflict situations around the world, the Under-Secretary-General focused his remarks on the five areas highlighted in the report, namely, the interplay between conflict and hunger and how the threat of famine had re-emerged in several areas in the previous year; the effects of using explosive weapons in populated areas and the devastating toll they inflicted on

⁹²² Ibid., para. 9.

⁹²³ Ibid., para. 12.

⁹²⁴ A concept note was circulated by a letter dated 14 May 2021 ([S/2021/468](#)).

⁹²⁵ See [S/2021/505](#).

⁹²⁶ For the report of the Secretary-General, see [S/2021/423](#).

essential civilian infrastructure; the impact of conflicts on the environment, especially in relation to water; the protection of medical care and the calls by the Secretary-General on States and armed forces to expand on the recommendations made in resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#); and ensuring that the behaviour of belligerents complied with international humanitarian law. The Under-Secretary-General also emphasized the crucial importance of accountability. He added that having the laws and the tools to protect civilians from harm in armed conflicts it was time that all States and parties to conflict applied them.

The President of the ICRC stated that global fragility was deepening due to the converging challenges of armed conflict, the pandemic, economic downturn, rising inequality and climate change.⁹²⁷ He added that due to the fragmentation and proliferation of actors, privatization of warfare, widespread availability of weapons and urban violence, violence within and between States and non-State armed groups was becoming even more complex. Highlighting the Committee's recent report on the systemic impacts of COVID-19 on communities shouldering the double burden of war and disease, the ICRC Director stated that he would focus his briefing on the serious and compounding protection challenges that were emerging. In that regard, he said that the pandemic had intensified existing protection needs and created new concerns. He pointed out that while the need for robust health-care systems had perhaps never been greater, health care was paradoxically under attack. Five years since the Council had adopted resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#) demanding an end to impunity for attacks on health care, the ICRC had observed in 40 countries affected by conflict that attacks on health care had gone unabated and health-care delivery continued to be impeded due to disregard for international humanitarian law. He affirmed that not enough was being done to protect health-care workers and medical facilities to translate resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#) into action and that a fundamental change of behaviour of belligerents in conflicts was needed, as well as better protection for civilians and more substantive and broader support for humanitarian action. The ICRC Director called the attention of Council members to five key points, namely, respect for international law and protection of civilians by the parties to conflict as well as rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to populations in need; prioritization of the full implementation of resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#)

⁹²⁷ See [S/2021/505](#).

by taking concrete steps to protect health care; Council members to act more decisively to improve their own action and leverage their special relationship with allies, partners and proxies to respect international humanitarian law; investing in local responses and prioritizing community engagement and trust-building before, during and after crises; strengthening health, water and sanitation services and protecting them at all times in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law.

Addressing the Council from a civil society perspective, the Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit noted that the role of media and women-led organizations had become more salient in Afghan civil society over the last two decades. She described the continued attacks on civilians and humanitarian plight in Afghanistan and called on the Council to bring that to the direct attention of all parties to the conflict and ask for practical mechanisms to be put in place to stop the targeting of civilians during fighting. She also called on the Council to support an internationally mandated independent investigation of atrocities against civilians in Afghanistan. She added that international support for the national security forces needed to include key war-related conventions and humanitarian principles in order to maximize the protection of civilians during the military operations and to set up a mechanism that could hold violators accountable. She further stated that while the only solution to ending the current cycle of violence and armed conflict was through peace talks, the current peace process was “in dire need of urgent boosting”. In that connection, she added that Council members had huge leverage to put stronger pressure on the Taliban and the rest of the political elites in Afghanistan to come to an agreement on a political settlement, with an immediate ceasefire as a first step.

In the ensuing discussion, Member States stressed the need for all parties to conflict to implement relevant Council resolutions and comply with international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian objects as well as to hold perpetrators accountable for grave violations, including for attacks on health care. In that connection, a number of speakers regretted that five years after the adoption of resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#), attacks on medical facilities and personnel continued unabated.⁹²⁸ Participants further noted that the pandemic had

⁹²⁸ Ibid., China, Estonia, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, United Kingdom, Viet Nam, Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, European Union, Georgia, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Poland, Republic of

exacerbated inequalities and harm to civilians in conflict, in particular to the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, displaced and disabled persons.⁹²⁹ Against that backdrop, Member States urged parties to conflicts to adhere to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, which was reflected in resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#), in order to address the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to civilians in need.⁹³⁰ Several speakers highlighted the role of United Nations peacekeeping missions in the protection of civilian populations, underscoring the importance for sufficient resources to be provided that were consistent with the mandate and the situation on the ground.⁹³¹ At the same time, some Member States underscored that the primary responsibility to protect civilians lied with national Governments.⁹³²

On 16 July 2021, at the initiative of France, which held the Presidency for the month, the Council held a ministerial-level meeting on the issue of preserving humanitarian space.⁹³³ At the meeting, the Council was briefed by the Deputy Secretary-General, the Director-General of the ICRC and the Delegate Director for Advocacy of Action against Hunger.⁹³⁴

The Deputy Secretary-General stated that the scale of humanitarian needs had never been greater and that the humanitarian crisis was compounded by a relentless wave of attacks on humanitarian and medical workers and the imposition of ever-narrower constraints on the humanitarian space. In that connection, she reiterated the Secretary-General's calls for the Council to take strong, immediate action to support its resolutions designed to protect civilians

Korea, San Marino, Spain (on behalf of the co-penholders on resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#), namely, Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Uruguay), and Switzerland (on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict).

⁹²⁹ Ibid., France, Mexico, Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Chile, El Salvador, European Union, Georgia, Italy, Malta, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Slovakia, South Africa, Switzerland (on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict), Turkey and Ukraine.

⁹³⁰ Ibid., China, Estonia, France, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (also on behalf of Kenya, Niger and Tunisia), Viet Nam, Algeria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, European Union, Indonesia, Italy, Malta, Norway, Republic of Korea, Qatar, San Marino, Spain (on behalf of the co-penholders on resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#), namely, Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Uruguay) and Turkey.

⁹³¹ Ibid., France, India, Norway, United States, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, European Union, Fiji, Nepal, Republic of Korea, South Africa, and Switzerland (on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict).

⁹³² Ibid., India, Norway, Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Fiji, Latvia, Portugal and South Africa.

⁹³³ A concept note was circulated by a letter dated 1 July 2021 ([S/2021/618](#)).

⁹³⁴ See [S/PV.8822](#).

and the humanitarian space. Drawing on examples of security incidents affecting humanitarian organizations in numerous conflicts around the world, she said that such incidents had increased tenfold since 2001, adding that in the five years since the Council's landmark resolution [2286 \(2016\)](#), health-care workers and patients had suffered thousands of attacks. She noted that it was becoming increasingly difficult to provide desperately needed humanitarian aid to people in need, highlighting examples of the crises in Tigray, Afghanistan and Yemen. While noting that humanitarian assistance had never reached so many people so quickly as a result of the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations, she added that measures were needed to protect humanitarian actors since humanitarian needs were outpacing the capacity to meet them. The Deputy Secretary-General stressed that the Council must do everything in its power to end attacks on humanitarian personnel and assets, to ensure and promote respect for international humanitarian law and to seek accountability for serious violations in line with the numerous resolutions. In that regard, she outlined four main areas for action: Firstly, the practical tools within and outside the Council to foster greater respect for international humanitarian law should be used systematically. Secondly, the investigation and accountability were essential to prevent attacks on aid workers. Thirdly, all Governments must protect humanitarian organizations' ability to engage with all parties to a conflict, including non-State armed groups. Fourthly, counter-terrorism measures should include explicit provisions to preserve humanitarian space and ensure that humanitarian workers were not punished for doing their jobs. Fifthly, the Deputy Secretary-General called on the Council to use its influence to ensure that attacks against schools and hospitals ceased immediately, adding that Member States should review and revise their military policies and practices to ensure the protection of such facilities.

The Director-General of the ICRC affirmed that the humanitarian space, or spaces, must be protected without exception. In that regard, he highlighted three of the most pressing concerns, namely, the politicization and manipulation of humanitarian aid; States resorting to armed escorts; and the growing negative impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on humanitarian aid. In terms of how these could be resolved, the Director-General asked States, including Council members to, firstly, ensure that humanitarian organizations were able to maintain close physical proximity to affected populations and sustained engagement with parties to conflict; secondly, to ensure that the key tenets of international humanitarian law were

respected and implemented, and finally, to consider and mitigate the humanitarian impact of counter-terrorism measures by putting in place well-crafted standing humanitarian exemptions.

The Delegate Director for Advocacy of Action Against Hunger affirmed that the current humanitarian needs were unprecedented and that the confluence of the effects of conflicts, environmental and climate crises, social inequalities and the COVID-19 pandemic were affecting those most in need disproportionately, leading to a veritable hunger pandemic. Humanitarian organizations were facing an unprecedented decrease in humanitarian space due to the widespread disdain for international humanitarian law by all, in particular warring parties, and the blatant instrumentalization of aid, which was increasingly threatening the humanitarian work. She noted that the Council had so far been unable to prevent or reverse the narrowing of humanitarian space and its failure to act was putting in jeopardy the lives of vulnerable people and the humanitarian workers helping them. She added that although certain conflicts had been on the Council's agenda for years, only sparse concrete action had been taken, effectively imperilling humanitarian space. In that connection, firm, rapid and unambiguous condemnations were required, followed by ambitious measures when respect for humanitarian space was flouted. While welcoming the historic progress represented by the adoption of Council landmark resolutions including resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#), she cautioned that those resolutions seemed to remain without effect as they were disregarded by States and parties in conflict, convinced that the Council would not follow up on their implementation. That inconsistency endangered human lives and the humanitarian work and undermined the credibility of the Council. She pointed out that the Council continued to adopt resolutions while failing to take into account the potentially harmful and extremely serious consequences that they might have for humanitarian activities as well as for humanitarian and medical personnel, in particular certain counter-terrorism measures and sanctions regimes. She added that such a lack of consistency encouraged States and parties in conflict to ignore their obligations concerning humanitarian space. In conflict areas, State and non-State armed actors prevented access and instrumentalized or criminalized humanitarian assistance, preventing dialogue with parties to the conflict and gradually eroding humanitarian neutrality and space. Moreover, she said that the requirement by some donors that beneficiaries of humanitarian aid undergo screening was a red line, as it compromised the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide impartial aid. Drawing attention to instances of attacks on

humanitarian workers in Sri Lanka, Tigray, Niger and Afghanistan, the Delegate Director called on the Council to take action and put an end to that deadly spiral. She also called on Council members to reaffirm their unequivocal support to aid based on humanitarian principles, while ensuring that their decisions did not block the humanitarian space. She also reiterated her call on the Council to adopt a systematic humanitarian exemption, thereby excluding impartial humanitarian work from the scope of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures. Further, she urged the Council to collectively and systematically condemn crimes against civilians and medical and humanitarian workers, adding that combating impunity for perpetrators must be a priority for the Council. In that regard, she said that the Council must systematically demand and support national and international inquiries to ensure that such crimes did not go unpunished. In closing, she welcomed the Secretary-General's announcement of the appointment of a Special Adviser for the Protection and Strengthening of the Humanitarian Space.

During the discussion that ensued, Council members expressed concern over increasing attacks on humanitarian workers, underscoring the need to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of such crimes to end the cycle of impunity that persisted in conflicts around the world. Several members also pointed to the negative impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on the delivery of humanitarian aid and stressed that such policies must not hinder humanitarian workers from performing their duties or interfere with their operations.⁹³⁵ In that connection, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico stressed that it was essential to understand in greater detail the scope of sanctions, especially in terms of unintended consequences. In the same vein, the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines opined that there was greater need for more systematic monitoring and reporting on the impact of sanctions regimes on humanitarian actions. In that regard, she suggested that efforts to systematize reporting could be undertaken by the Secretariat and that humanitarian impact and risk assessments should precede the establishment and renewal of all sanctions regimes. A number of speakers were of the view however that applicable Security Council sanctions could target those responsible for crimes against humanitarian and medical personnel therefore serving

⁹³⁵ Ibid., Mexico, Kenya, United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Niger, China, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Norway.

as deterrents.⁹³⁶ In that regard, some members recognized the progress achieved through resolution [2582 \(2021\)](#), on the sanctions regime concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁹³⁷ Some representatives advocated for the lifting of unilateral sanctions altogether.⁹³⁸ A number of speakers cautioned against the politicization of humanitarian operations,⁹³⁹ and stressed the primary responsibility of States in protecting civilians as well as humanitarian workers.⁹⁴⁰ Furthermore, some members called for referring cases to the International Criminal Court when States were unwilling or unable to prosecute perpetrators.⁹⁴¹ A few speakers also expressed support for the Humanitarian Call to Action, which aimed to strengthen accountability for those who would attack medical and humanitarian workers in the course of their work.⁹⁴²

Throughout 2021, the Council continued the practice of hearing briefings by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict under country- and region-specific items.⁹⁴³ The Council also included protection-related provisions in most of its decisions in relation to both country- or region-specific as well as thematic items during 2021. The Council focused on multiple aspects and used a variety of language formulas to address the protection of civilians in its decisions. Selected provisions of those decisions are listed in table 3. In particular, the Council (a) condemned all forms of attacks and abuses committed against civilians as well as against objects indispensable to their survival, especially against women and children, humanitarian and medical workers, including attacks against schools and education facilities,⁹⁴⁴ hospitals and medical facilities; (b) demanded that all parties to armed conflict ensure unhindered access for delivery of

⁹³⁶ Ibid., France, Mexico, India, United Kingdom, Estonia, Ireland and Norway.

⁹³⁷ Ibid., France, Mexico and Norway. For more information on developments with regard to the sanctions measures concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, see part VII, sect. III.

⁹³⁸ See [S/PV.8822](#), China and Russian Federation.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., Mexico, India, Niger, China and Norway.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., Mexico, India, China and Viet Nam.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., France, Mexico, Estonia and Norway.

⁹⁴² Ibid., France, Mexico and Ireland.

⁹⁴³ In 2021, the Council heard briefings by the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 28 times at either public meetings or open videoconferences and 17 times in either closed meetings or informal consultations, for a total of 45 briefings. For more information on briefings on those items prior to 2021, see *Repertoire, Supplement 2020*, part I, sect. 26.

⁹⁴⁴ For more information on the decisions of the Council concerning children and armed conflict and specifically the protection of schools and education facilities, see part I, sect. 24.

humanitarian assistance to populations in need, and ensure safety of humanitarian and medical personnel; (c) called upon all relevant parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law and called for accountability measures against perpetrators of such crimes; (d) emphasised the primary responsibility of States to comply with their relevant obligations to protect civilians; (e) requested additional monitoring mechanisms as well as reporting arrangements in order to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and (f) adopted or expressed its intention to adopt targeted measures, such as sanctions, against perpetrators. In addition, the Council practice of strengthening the mandates of United Nations peace operations with a view to protecting civilians continued to evolve. During the reporting period, the Council continued to request several missions to take the protection of civilians under threat of physical violence as specific priorities and benchmarks of their mandates, with particular attention, but not limited to women, children and internally displaced persons, including by creating a secure environment for the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as strengthening local community engagement and empowerment, early warning and information-sharing mechanisms.⁹⁴⁵

Table 1
Meetings: Protection of civilians in armed conflict

| <i>Meeting record and date</i> | <i>Sub-item</i> | <i>Other documents</i> | <i>Rule 37 invitations</i> | <i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i> | <i>Speakers</i> | <i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i> |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| S/PV.8822 16 July 2021 | Preserving humanitarian space Letter dated 1 July 2021 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2021/618) | | | Deputy Secretary-General, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Delegate Director for Advocacy at Action Against Hunger | Deputy Secretary-General, all Council members, ^a all invitees | |

⁹⁴⁵ For further details on the mandates of peacekeeping and special political missions, see part X.

^a France was represented by its Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs. Kenya was represented by its Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs. India was represented by its Foreign Secretary. Mexico was represented by its Minister for Foreign Affairs. Tunisia was represented by its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad. United States was represented by its Permanent Representative and Member of the President's Cabinet.

Table 2
Videoconferences: Protection of civilians in armed conflict

| <i>Videoconference date</i> | <i>Videoconference record</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining) and record of written procedure</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 27 April 2021 | S/2021/415 | Letter dated 29 April 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council | Resolution 2573 (2021) 15-0-0 S/2021/407 |
| 25 May 2021 | S/2021/505 | Letter dated 27 May 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council | |

Table 3
Selection of provisions relevant to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, by theme and agenda item

| | <i>Agenda item</i> | <i>Decision</i> | <i>Paragraph</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------|
| Condemnation and demands of cessation of attacks and acts of violence against civilian and civilian infrastructure, humanitarian and medical personnel | | | |
| Country and region-specific | The situation in Afghanistan | Resolution 2593 (2021) | 1 |
| | The situation in the Central African Republic | Resolution 2605 (2021) | 3, 4, 25, 26, 54 |
| | The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo | Resolution 2612 (2021) | 9, 12 |
| | The situation in Somalia | Resolution 2568 (2021) | 38 |
| | | Resolution 2592 (2021) | 12 |
| | Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan | Resolution 2609 (2021) | 28 |
| | | Resolution 2567 (2021) | 9 |
| | Peace consolidation in West Africa | S/PRST/2021/3 | Twelfth |
| | | S/PRST/2021/16 | Fourth |
| Thematic | The situation in the Great Lakes region | S/PRST/2021/19 | Seventh |
| | Children and armed conflict | Resolution 2601 (2021) | 1, 2, 8 |
| | Protection of civilians in armed conflict | Resolution 2573 (2021) | 1, 4, 5 |

Demands parties to allow humanitarian access and safety of humanitarian and medical personnel and facilities

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| Country and region-specific | The situation in Afghanistan | Resolution 2593 (2021) | 3 |
| | The situation in the Central African Republic | Resolution 2601 (2021) | 25 |
| | | Resolution 2605 (2021) | 52, 53 |
| | The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo | Resolution 2612 (2021) | 35 |
| | The situation in Mali | Resolution 2584 (2021) | 51 |
| | Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan | Resolution 2567 (2021) | 10 |
| | | Resolution 2609 (2021) | 25 |
| Thematic | Peace consolidation in West Africa | S/PRST/2021/16 | Twelfth |
| | Maintenance of international peace and security | Resolution 2565 (2021) | 3, 4 |
| | Protection of civilians in armed conflict | Resolution 2573 (2021) | 7 |
| | Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts | Resolution 2615 (2021) | 3 |
| | Calls for compliance with and accountability under applicable international humanitarian law human rights law and relevant Security Council resolutions by all parties | | |
| Country and region-specific | The situation in the Central African Republic | Resolution 2605 (2021) | 14, 22 |
| | The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo | Resolution 2612 (2021) | 6, 11, 12, 19, 34 |
| | The situation in Libya | Resolution 2570 (2021) | 11 |
| | The situation Mali | Resolution 2584 (2021) | 15, 36, 50 |
| | The situation in Somalia | Resolution 2592 (2021) | 10 |
| | | Resolution 2568 (2021) | 31, 35, 36 |
| | | Resolution 2607 (2021) | 16 |
| Thematic | Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan | Resolution 2567 (2021) | 8, 9, 15 |
| | Protection of civilians in armed conflict | Resolution 2573 (2021) | 2, 3 |
| Affirmation of primary responsibility of States and parties to the conflict to protect civilians | | | |
| Country and region-specific | The situation in the Central African Republic | Resolution 2605 (2021) | 34 (a) (i), 35 (f) (vii) |
| | | Resolution 2566 (2021) | 2 |
| | The situation Mali | Resolution 2584 (2021) | 14, 30 (c) (i) |
| | The situation in Somalia | Resolution 2568 (2021) | 5 |
| | Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan | Resolution 2567 (2021) | 18 (d) |
| Thematic | United Nations peacekeeping operations | Resolution 2594 (2021) | 5 |
| | Children and armed conflict | Resolution 2601 (2021) | 5 |
| Requests for specific monitoring and analysis of and reporting on protection of civilians | | | |

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| Country and region-specific | The situation in the Central African Republic | Resolution 2605 (2021) | 35 (a) (i) |
| | The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo | Resolution 2612 (2021) | 29 (ii) (e), 42 |
| | The situation Mali | Resolution 2584 (2021) | 30 (d) (ii) |
| | The situation in the Middle East | Resolution 2585 (2021) | 5 |
| | The situation in Somalia | Resolution 2568 (2021) | 17, 18 |
| | | Resolution 2607 (2021) | 43 |
| | Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan | Resolution 2567 (2021) | 3 (d) (i)-(iv) |
| | | Resolution 2577 (2021) | 22 |
| | | Resolution 2609 (2021) | 30 (a), 34 |
| | | | |
| Thematic | Children and armed conflict | Resolution 2601 (2021) | 19 |
| | Maintenance of international peace and security | Resolution 2565 (2021) | 7 |
| | Protection of civilians in armed conflict | Resolution 2573 (2021) | 12 |
| | United Nations peacekeeping operations | Resolution 2594 (2021) | 4 |
| Imposition of targeted measures against perpetrators of violations against civilians in armed conflict | | | |
| Country and region-specific | The situation in the Central African Republic | Resolution 2588 (2021) | 5 |
| | | Resolution 2605 (2021) | 5, 22 |
| | The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo | Resolution 2582 (2021) | 3 |
| | | Resolution 2612 (2021) | 5 |
| | The situation Mali | Resolution 2590 (2021) | 2 |
| | Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan | Resolution 2567 (2021) | 16 |
| | | Resolution 2577 (2021) | 12 |
| | | | |
| Inclusion of mission-specific protection mandates and benchmarks^a | | | |
| Country and region-specific | The situation in the Central African Republic | Resolution 2605 (2021) | 34(a) (i)-(iv), 34(c) |
| | The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo | Resolution 2612 (2021) | 29 (i)), 31, 36, 43 |
| | The situation Mali | Resolution 2584 (2021) | 30 (b) (i), (iii), 30 (c) (ii), (iii), 30 (d) (i) |
| | The situation in Somalia | Resolution 2568 (2021) | 39 (iv) |
| | Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan | Resolution 2567 (2021) | 3 (a) 3 (b) (i) |
| | | Resolution 2579 (2021) | 3(iii) (a), (b), (c), (d), 3 (iv) (b) |
| | | Resolution 2609 (2021) | 14, 30 (j) |
| | | | |
| Thematic | Children and armed conflict | Resolution 2601 (2021) | 23 |

^a For additional information on mandates and decisions relevant to peacekeeping and political missions, see part X.