



STATEMENT  
ON BEHALF OF

**The Group of Friends on  
the Responsibility to Protect**

DELIVERED BY

**Her Excellency Ambassador Alya Ahmed S. Al-Thani  
Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar  
to the United Nations**

BEFORE

**The Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council**

ON

**Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict**

UN Headquarters - New York  
22 May 2018

*Please check against delivery*

**Madam President,**

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, consisting of 50 Member States and the European Union, and co-chaired this year by Italy and the State of Qatar.

The Group would like to thank Poland for organizing today's important Open Debate. I also would like to extend our gratitude to Secretary-General António Guterres, to the Director-General of the ICRC, Mr. Yves Daccord, and Ms. Hanaa Edwar, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association for their highly informative briefings.

**Madam President,**

Today we bear witness to a continuing and pervasive degradation of respect for civilian lives and an appalling disregard for the norms and laws that the international community established to alleviate the effects of armed conflict. The results are tremendous human suffering and a high risk of mass atrocity crimes. Although all States have a responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, more than 65 million people are currently displaced as a result of conflict, atrocities and persecution worldwide. The commission of systematic, flagrant and widespread violations of applicable international humanitarian law and human rights law in situations of armed conflict may constitute a threat to international peace and security.

It is within this context that the Group of Friends would like to stress the following points:

Firstly, full and effective compliance with international law is fundamental to the protection of civilians. Many civilian deaths, as well as suffering and displacement, could be avoided if all parties to conflicts respected international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Secondly, it is of the utmost importance that States put in place appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to comprehensively address violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, and hold those who commit such violations and abuses accountable. Accountability for serious violations of the law of armed conflict and human rights violations and abuses not only helps provide justice for victims, but also deters future violations and abuses.

States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdiction, and national accountability efforts should be encouraged and supported, including through the strengthening of judicial cooperation between states. International investigative and judicial mechanisms, including fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry, international courts and hybrid tribunals — including the International Criminal Court in circumstances that are properly within its jurisdiction — provide complementary avenues to enable accountability when and where national options prove insufficient.

Thirdly, we are witnessing widespread attacks directed against civilian infrastructure, such as healthcare facilities and schools. Let's not forget that deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against medical facilities and civilian infrastructures such as schools, as well as on the civilian population, including humanitarian workers, may amount to war crimes.

In recent years, there has been a pattern of attacks on schools, students, teachers and other education personnel by state security forces or non-state armed groups. In 2016, the UN was able to verify 753 attacks on schools and hospitals. From May 2016 to today, the ICRC has registered in 16 countries alone over 1,200 incidents of violence against healthcare facilities or personnel. Practically, an incident of violence against healthcare facilities or personnel has taken place every single week since the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 2286, regarding the protection of medical and humanitarian personnel and facilities.

Fourthly, protection of civilians should be sensitive to gender considerations. Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security note that armed conflict and emergencies have a differential impact on women, girls, men and boys. Women's needs must be considered and addressed. The Group urges the United Nations and other relevant actors to ensure that affected populations, including women, are involved in the development of protection of civilians strategies and activities.

Lastly, journalists play an important role in bringing attention to conflict situations and mobilizing action in situations where atrocity crimes are committed. Independent reporting can put pressure on political actors to find solutions to conflicts and can contribute to promoting accountability. According to Reporters without Borders, more than 1,000 professional journalists have been killed in the past 15 years - with an

average of two deaths per week, and more than 24 already killed in 2018. Member states should create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for journalists reporting in conflict situations.

**Madam President,**

Far too many civilians are killed in both direct and indiscriminate attacks in today's complex and protracted conflicts. The international community should make every effort to assist civilians caught up in these conflicts. The Members of the Security Council should take timely and decisive action aimed at ending and preventing atrocities and not hinder credible efforts to this end.

Finally, the surest way to protect civilian populations is by investing in the prevention of conflict and peaceful settlements of dispute, based on the principles of justice and international law.

**Thank you.**