

## 27. Protection of civilians in armed conflict

In 2023, the Security Council held one meeting in connection with the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which took the form of an open debate.<sup>896</sup> No decisions were adopted during the period under review. More information on the meeting, including on participants and speakers is provided in table 1 below.<sup>897</sup>

On 23 May 2023, at the initiative of Switzerland, which held the presidency of the Council for the month,<sup>898</sup> the Council held a high-level open debate under the sub-item entitled “Ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in conflict: addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services”.<sup>899</sup> At the meeting, the Council heard briefings by the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the President of the Network of Women-led Organisations of the Lake Chad Basin.

Presenting his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict,<sup>900</sup> the Secretary-General reported about the devastating impact of war on civilian lives, as highlighted by the use of explosive weapons in urban areas, record displacement and food insecurity.<sup>901</sup> To alleviate the impact of conflict on civilians, his newly appointed United Nations Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator was leading a system-wide response to rising food insecurity, including through the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. Moreover, the Black Sea Initiative had helped to stabilize markets, bring down prices and ease the food crisis. The Secretary-General recalled that in November 2022, States had adopted the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, urging all States to join the initiative. Further, in light of the adoption of resolution [2664 \(2022\)](#) in December 2022, he also urged all States to implement it and to exclude humanitarian and medical activities from their own counter-terrorism and sanctions measures. He underlined that Council members had a special role to play

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<sup>896</sup> For more information on the format of meetings, see part II, sect. I.

<sup>897</sup> See also [A/78/2](#), part II, chap. 14.

<sup>898</sup> A concept note was circulated by letter dated 1 May 2023 ([S/2023/307](#)).

<sup>899</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#).

<sup>900</sup> See [S/2023/345](#).

<sup>901</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#).

in urging States to respect the rules of war, particularly those with influence over warring parties, to take concrete actions to protect civilians, ensure humanitarian access and hold perpetrators of war crimes accountable. In concluding, the Secretary-General urged the international community to live up to its promise to safeguard civilian lives in times of war.

The President of the ICRC, reporting about the increasing frequency and intensity of non-international armed conflicts over the past two decades, emphasized how protracted conflicts, climate shocks, food insecurity and economic hardships compounded the suffering of civilians, leading to widespread destruction and violations of international humanitarian law.<sup>902</sup> She urged states to protect civilians and critical infrastructure in urban areas, calling for prevention and mitigation of food insecurity in conflict-affected areas. Highlighting the necessity of upholding international humanitarian law for all genders, she emphasized the need for gender perspectives in applying international humanitarian law and urged that the prohibition of sexual violence be integrated into national laws and military doctrines.

The President of the Network of Women-led Organizations of the Lake Chad Basin spoke about the humanitarian crisis caused by Boko Haram and other armed groups in the Lake Chad Basin, which had affected millions and exacerbated poverty among women and children.<sup>903</sup> Noting that women bore the brunt of the crises, she advocated for inclusive responses and sustainable solutions drawing on local knowledge and stressed the need for gender analysis in decision-making processes, in particular when implementing resolution [2417 \(2018\)](#) and support for women's participation in peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts. Further, considering the effects of climate change on agriculture, she also called for adaptation programs and support for transitions to sustainable, green economies.

During the debate that ensued, Member States underscored the devastating effects of conflicts on civilian populations, including death, injury, displacement and psychological trauma. Several speakers stressed that civilians, especially women and children, continued to be the main victims of armed conflict, facing threats from both direct violence and the destruction of essential services.<sup>904</sup> In that connection, many delegations pointed out that according to the latest

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<sup>902</sup> Ibid.

<sup>904</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#) (Gabon and China) and [S/PV.9327 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Viet Nam, Sierra Leone, Argentina and Lebanon).

annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians, there had been an increase of over fifty per cent in civilian deaths in 2022 compared to the previous year.<sup>905</sup> With regard to the link between armed conflict and food insecurity, Member States emphasized how conflict remained the main drive of hunger by disrupting food systems and markets, which was exacerbated by climate change.<sup>906</sup> In that connection, several speakers referred to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine as a driver of the high level of food insecurity in the world and welcomed the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.<sup>907</sup> Delegations also stressed that the destruction of infrastructure and the targeting of services exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, particularly in urban conflict zones. In that connection, most speakers referred to resolution [2417 \(2018\)](#) as well as to resolution [2573 \(2021\)](#), which emphasized the causal link between armed conflict and food insecurity and urged parties to conflict to protect essential services. A number of Member States underscored the need for stronger political will and effective implementation of the existing normative framework in order to protect civilians from conflict-induced hunger.<sup>908</sup> Some delegations underscored the severe consequences of sanctions regimes on the provision of humanitarian assistance, exacerbating food insecurity in situations of armed conflict.<sup>909</sup> In that connection, several delegations welcomed the adoption of resolution [2664 \(2022\)](#), in December of 2022, which established a carveout from United Nations sanctions to preserve the provision of humanitarian assistance.<sup>910</sup>

Throughout 2023, the Council continued the practice of hearing briefings by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs concerning the protection of civilians in armed

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<sup>905</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#) (United States, Gabon and Japan) and [S/PV.9327 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Slovenia, Portugal and Nepal).

<sup>906</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#) (Switzerland, Brazil, Ghana, Japan and Finland (on behalf of the Nordic countries)) and [S/PV.9327 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Republic of Korea, India, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Ireland (on behalf of the Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger), Croatia, Latvia, Indonesia, Thailand, Slovenia, Argentina, Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), South Africa, Dominican Republic, Bangladesh and Bahrain).

<sup>907</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#) (Switzerland, Malta, Brazil, United Kingdom, United States, Albania, Japan, France and Canada) and [S/PV.9327 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Ukraine, India, European Union, Liechtenstein, Ireland, Austria, Pakistan, Poland, Germany, Georgia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Greece, Belgium, Estonia, Spain, Nepal, Nigeria and Italy).

<sup>908</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#) (Malta, Brazil, United Arab Emirates, Ecuador, Gabon, Albania and France) and [S/PV.9327 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Ireland (on behalf of the Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger), Norway (on behalf of the Global Alliance for the Missing), Uruguay, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Azerbaijan).

<sup>909</sup> See [S/PV.9327](#) (United Arab Emirates, Russian Federation and China) and [S/PV.9327 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Iran (Islamic Republic of)).

<sup>910</sup> [S/PV.9327](#) (Malta, Brazil and United Arab Emirates) and [S/PV.9327 \(Resumption 1\)](#) (Kuwait (on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict), Croatia, Uruguay and Portugal).

conflict under country- and region-specific items.<sup>911</sup> The Council also included protection-related provisions in most of its decisions in relation to both country- and region-specific items and thematic ones during the year. The Council focused on multiple aspects of the protection of civilians agenda 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 2 below.

In particular, the Council: (a) strongly condemned all forms of violence and abuses committed against civilians, in particular against women and children, and demanded the cessation of attacks against humanitarian and medical personnel and civilian infrastructure, including attacks against schools, hospitals and humanitarian facilities;<sup>912</sup> (b) demanded that all parties to armed conflict ensure rapid, safe and unhindered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need and ensure the 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) emphasized the primary responsibility of States to comply with their relevant obligations and called for their action to protect civilians; (e) requested additional monitoring and response mechanisms to threats and attacks against civilians and reporting arrangements in order to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict; and (f) adopted or expressed its intention to adopt targeted measures, including sanctions, against individuals or entities who violated international humanitarian and human rights law. In that regard, the Council recalled resolution [2664 \(2022\)](#) in several country- and regional items on its agenda throughout 2023.<sup>913</sup>

In addition, the Council's 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 make the protection of civilians under threat

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<sup>911</sup> In 2023, the Council heard briefings by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 21 times at public or private meetings and 14 times at informal consultations, for a total of 35 briefings. For more information on briefings on those items prior to 2023, see *Repertoire, Supplement 2022*, part I, sect. 27.

<sup>912</sup> For more information on the decisions of the Council concerning children and armed conflict, and specifically the protection of schools and education facilities, see sect. 26 above. For more information on the decisions of the Council concerning conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence, see sect. 29 below.

<sup>913</sup> Resolution [2664 \(2022\)](#), para. 1. For more information on the economic problems arising from the implementation of sanctions by the Council, see part VII, sect. IX.

of physical violence a specific priority and benchmark of their mandates, with particular attention on, but not limited to, women, children, refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as humanitarian personnel, including by creating a secure environment for the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, strengthening local community engagement and empowerment and early warning mechanisms, and using strategic communications to counter disinformation and misinformation.<sup>914</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Meeting: Protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2023**

<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>
<a href="#">S/PV.9327</a> <a href="#">S/PV.9327</a> <a href="#">(Resumption 1)</a> 23 May 2023	Ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in conflict: addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services		66 Member states <sup>a</sup>	President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), President of the Network of Women-led Organisations of the Lake Chad Basin, Director-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission	Secretary-General, all Council members <sup>b</sup> , all invitees <sup>c</sup>	
	Letter dated 1 May 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General ( <a href="#">S/2023/307</a> )					
	Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict ( <a href="#">S/2023/345</a> )					

<sup>a</sup> Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iran (the Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uruguay, Viet Nam and Yemen.

<sup>b</sup> The meeting was presided over by the President of Switzerland. Malta and Mozambique were represented by their Presidents. Brazil was represented by its Minister for Foreign Affairs. Ghana was represented by its Minister for the Interior. The United Arab Emirates was represented by its Minister of Climate Change and Environment. The United Kingdom was represented by its Minister of State for South Asia, Middle East, North Africa and the United Nations, Foreign Commonwealth and Development

<sup>914</sup> For more information on the mandates of peacekeeping and special political missions, see part X.

Office and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. The United States was represented by its Permanent Representative and Member of the President's Cabinet.

° Armenia was represented by its Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. Finland was represented by its State Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and spoke on behalf of the Nordic Countries. Canada was represented by its Assistant Deputy Minister for Global Affairs. Kuwait spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians. Ireland spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger. Croatia spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect. Norway spoke on behalf of the Global Alliance for the Missing.

**Table 2**  
**Selection of provisions relevant to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, by theme and agenda item, 2023**

	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Paragraph</i>
<b>Condemns and demands for the cessation of attacks and acts of violence against civilians and civilian infrastructure and humanitarian and medical personnel</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	3, 4, 22, 27
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/3</a>	eleventh
		Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	7, 9, 10
	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/1</a>	sixth
		Resolution <a href="#">2720 (2023)</a>	9
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution <a href="#">2705 (2023)</a>	9
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	11
<b>Thematic</b>	Maintenance of international peace and security	<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/4</a>	twentieth
<b>Demands parties to allow immediate humanitarian access and ensure the safety of humanitarian and medical personnel and facilities</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in Afghanistan	Resolution <a href="#">2681 (2023)</a>	3
	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	25, 26
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	40
	The question concerning Haiti	Resolution <a href="#">2692 (2023)</a>	15, 16
	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	Resolution <a href="#">2720 (2023)</a>	2, 3, 7, 13, 14
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution <a href="#">2687 (2023)</a>	4
		Resolution <a href="#">2705 (2023)</a>	9, 9(a)
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	10, 12
<b>Thematic</b>	Maintenance of international peace and security	<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/4</a>	Twenty-second, twenty-fourth

	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Paragraph</i>
<b>Calls for compliance with and accountability under applicable international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law and relevant Security Council resolutions by all parties</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	9, 13, 20, 23
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution <a href="#">2688 (2023)</a>	4
		Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	5, 6
	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/1</a>	fifth, eighth
		Resolution <a href="#">2720 (2023)</a>	1, 11
The situation in Somalia	Resolution <a href="#">2705 (2023)</a>	7(a),(b)	
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	9
<b>Thematic</b>	Maintenance of international peace and security	<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/4</a>	twenty-third
<b>Affirms the primary responsibility of States and parties to conflict to protect civilians and calls for action to protect civilians</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	Resolution <a href="#">2720 (2023)</a>	10
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution <a href="#">2687 (2023)</a>	1
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	5
<b>Thematic</b>	Maintenance of international peace and security	<a href="#">Resolution 2686 (2023)</a>	6
		<a href="#">S/PRST/2023/4</a>	first, sixth
<b>Requests for specific monitoring and analysis of and reporting on protection of civilians</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in Afghanistan	Resolution <a href="#">2679 (2023)</a>	1
	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	37 (a) (i), (ii), 43
		Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	35, 39, 47
	The question concerning Haiti	Resolution <a href="#">2692 (2023)</a>	10
		Resolution <a href="#">2699 (2023)</a>	11
	The situation in the Middle East	Resolution <a href="#">2672 (2023)</a>	2, 5, 6
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2683 (2023)</a>	24
	Peace and security in Africa	Resolution <a href="#">2713 (2023)</a>	28

	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Paragraph</i>
<b>Imposes targeted measures against perpetrators of violations against civilians in armed conflict</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2693 (2023)</a>	5
	Peace and security in Africa	Resolution <a href="#">2713 (2023)</a>	3
<b>Thematic</b>	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	18
		Resolution <a href="#">2683 (2023)</a>	13
	Maintenance of international peace and security	Resolution <a href="#">2698 (2023)</a>	5
<b>Stresses of the need to minimize adverse humanitarian consequences of sanctions measures and humanitarian exemptions</b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2693 (2023)</a>	Fourteenth preambular paragraph
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution <a href="#">2688 (2023)</a>	Seventh preambular paragraph
	The situation in Libya	Resolution <a href="#">2701(2023)</a>	Eighth preambular paragraph
	Peace and security in Africa	Resolution <a href="#">2713 (2023)</a>	3
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2683 (2023)</a>	Fourteenth preambular paragraph
<b>Includes mission-specific protection mandates and benchmarks<sup>a</sup></b>			
<b>Country and region-specific</b>	The situation in the Central African Republic	Resolution <a href="#">2709 (2023)</a>	33, 36 (a) (i) – (a) (iv), 36 (b) (iii), 36 (c) (viii), 36 (d), 37 (a), 37 (a) (i), 37 (a) (iii)
	The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Resolution <a href="#">2717 (2023)</a>	31, 33, 34, 34 (i), 34 (i) (a), 34 (i) (e–g), 37
	The question concerning Haiti	Resolution <a href="#">2699 (2023)</a>	6
	The situation in the Middle East	Resolution <a href="#">2695 (2023)</a>	22
	The situation in Somalia	Resolution <a href="#">2687 (2023)</a>	26 (c)
		Resolution <a href="#">2705 (2023)</a>	3 (f) (iii) (i), 9 (a) (iii)
	Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan	Resolution <a href="#">2677 (2023)</a>	3, 3 (a) (i)-(iv), 3 (b), 3 (b) (i), 3 (c) (ii), 3 (c) (vii), 3 (d), 3 (d) (i), 3 (d) (iv), 30

<sup>a</sup> For additional information on mandates and decisions relevant to peacekeeping and political missions, see part X.