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Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

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Introduction

Protection of Civilians in armed conflict (PoC) is one of the United Nations' most pressing challenges. Since World War I, there have been countless conflicts with countless casualties. Civilians often bear the brunt, holding nearly 90 percent of all total casualties.¹ Just in 2024, there have been “more than 36,000 civilian deaths in 14 armed conflicts.”²

We also see that civilians are affected in conflict in ways other than just death. Civilian infrastructure, including electricity, sanitation, water, education, and livelihoods, is all being compromised through the effects of war. The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide has now surpassed 122 million, a record. By the end of 2024, one in every 67 people has been forced to flee their homes because of persecution and violence.³ Humanitarian workers, journalists, and medical staff also face unprecedented levels of violence, with more than 360 aid workers killed, 53 journalists slain, and dozens of hospitals deliberately attacked.²

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 established protocols for nations to follow in this instance of conflict and war, offering clear principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution, obligating parties to spare civilians and civilian objects from attack.⁴ Yet, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, from Vietnam to Biafra to Cambodia, these norms were routinely violated, and civilians often became the deliberate targets of warfare rather than incidental victims.

The late 1970s saw the emergence of PoC as an issue that the international community adopted, seeing a number of resolutions and missions being formed to directly address it, beginning

¹ “Ninety per Cent of War-Time Casualties Are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflicts | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases,” 25 May 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>

² UN Security Council, “9921st Meeting UNSC,” UN Press, May 22, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/PV.9921>.

³ ‘UNHCR: Global Forced Displacement Surges Past 122 million’, *HIAS*, 18 June 2025, <https://hias.org/news/unhcr-global-forced-displacement-surges-past-122-million/>

⁴ ICRC, “What Are the Geneva Conventions and Their Additional Protocols?,” 13 August 2017, <https://blogs.icrc.org/ilot/2017/08/13/geneva-conventions-additional-protocols/>

with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁵ This convention establishes a humanitarian framework for children, especially in the instance of war and conflict. Basic rights that this convention enumerates are the right to education, peace, and security.

Despite continued efforts past the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, further progress has been stalled due to issues within the Security Council. As many of the armed conflicts continue into 2024, civilians are still being killed with no measurable improvement in aid or reform being offered by the United Nations. The United Nations has long committed itself to protecting civilians and ensuring international peace in their charter.⁶ By allowing these casualties to continue, the UN is failing at this mission and raises questions about its credibility as an arbiter of peace.

To fill the gaps left by the UN, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have begun work to directly address the issue. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as *Save the Children*, *Amnesty International*, and the *Humanitarian Policy Group*. These organizations have done much of the groundwork in collaboration with UN agencies such as *The United Nations Children's Fund* (UNICEF).

The scale and persistence of civilian suffering in modern conflicts underscore both the urgency of protection and the limits of current international responses. While NGOs and UN agencies provide critical support on the ground, their efforts cannot substitute for comprehensive international action.

The repeated failures to safeguard civilians highlight a gap between the norms established by international law and the realities of armed conflict, leaving the credibility of the UN system in question. To understand why these gaps endure, it is essential to examine how the protection of civilians evolved from a humanitarian aspiration to a formal agenda item within the United Nations, and how historical experiences shaped the frameworks in place today.



Protection of Civilians (POC) site near Bentiu, in Unity State, South Sudan.⁷

Background

The UN Charter established a world order that was rooted in the prevention of war and the promotion of human rights. Articles 1⁵ and 55⁸ call for respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, forming the Charter's humanitarian foundation. Yet the same document enshrines the principles of state

⁵ OHCHR. n.d. "Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR."

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

⁶ "Chapter I: Article 1 — Charter of the United Nations — Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs — Codification Division Publications," n.d., <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art1.shtml>

⁷ "UNMISS Humanitarian Coordinator Visits Bentiu IDP Camp with Dutch and British Ambassadors," UN Photo, 23 August 2014, <https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7257274>

⁸ "Chapter IX: Article 55 — Charter of the United Nations — Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs — Codification Division Publications," n.d., <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art55.shtml>



sovereignty in Article 2⁹, which forbids intervention in the domestic affairs of states. This dual commitment to protect human rights while also respecting sovereignty creates a structural contradiction that continues to define the limits of international action. While the Charter envisions global cooperation to uphold human dignity, it binds the UN to a system where consent from states remains the precondition for any form of intervention.

To further define and give legal force to the humanitarian ideals laid out in the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977³ were passed, establishing clear rules to protect civilians and non-combatants in times of war. The principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution required parties to spare civilians from attack and to avoid excessive harm. However, postwar conflicts, from Vietnam to Cambodia and later Rwanda, showed that these norms were often ignored. The Conventions provided a legal framework but lack the effective mechanisms for enforcement, leaving civilian protection dependent on political will rather than legal obligation.

The failure of that political will became most evident during the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.¹⁰ Despite clear warnings of impending violence, the UN Security Council drastically reduced the

mandate and size of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR)¹¹ at the height of the crisis. Haunted by the U.S. experience in Somalia, Council members hesitated to commit troops to what they viewed as an internal conflict.¹² The massacre of more than 800,000⁹ civilians in a matter of months revealed the tragic consequences of the UN's structural paralysis and catalyzed global debate over the moral responsibility to intervene in cases of mass atrocity.

In the years that followed, the Security Council began to reconsider the relationship between sovereignty and humanitarianism. Security Council Resolution 1265 (1999)¹³ marked the first formal recognition of civilian protection as a distinct thematic issue on the Council's agenda. It condemned deliberate attacks on civilians and called for improved humanitarian access. Resolution 1296 (2000)¹⁴ further advanced this agenda by affirming that the deliberate targeting of civilians could constitute a threat to international peace and security. Together, these resolutions laid the groundwork for integrating protection of civilians (PoC) mandates into UN peacekeeping operations, signaling a shift from passive observation to proactive protection.

The adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)¹⁵ doctrine at the 2005 World Summit

⁹ "Chapter I: Article 2(1)–(5) — Charter of the United Nations — Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs — Codification Division Publications," n.d.,

<https://legal.un.org/repertory/art2.shtml>

¹⁰ United Nations, "Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations," n.d.,

<https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>

¹¹ "Security Council Ends UNAMIR Mandate on 8 March 1996, Adjusts Objectives, Responds to Wishes of Rwandan Government | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," 12 December 1995, <https://press.un.org/en/1995/19951212.sc6141.html>

¹² "Somalia Has Not Been Abandoned by International Community, Say Speakers in Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," March 15, 1996, <https://press.un.org/en/1996/19960315.sc6194.html>

¹³ UN Security Council, "UN Security Council," 1999, [https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/1265\(1999\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/1265(1999)).

¹⁴ Reliefworld - UNHCR's Global Law and Policy Database, "Security Council Resolution 1296 (2000) [on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts]," Reliefworld, 12 February 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unsc/2000/en/171.48>

¹⁵ United Nations, "About the Responsibility to Protect | United Nations," n.d.,

represented a major normative breakthrough. R2P reframed sovereignty as a responsibility rather than an entitlement, asserting that states must protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. When states fail to do so, the international community, through the UN, bears a collective responsibility to intervene, preferably through diplomatic, humanitarian, or as a last resort, military means.

However, in practice, R2P has been applied inconsistently. The swift authorization of Intervention in Libya (2011)¹⁶ under R2P contrasted sharply with the Security Council's paralysis in Syria¹⁷, where repeated vetoes by Russia and China blocked meaningful collective action despite massive civilian suffering.

At the heart of these failures lies the political structure of the Security Council itself. The veto power of the five permanent members ensures that intervention decisions often reflect national interests rather than moral imperatives. Efforts to expand or reform the Council's decision-making have repeatedly stalled, leaving the UN's ability to act hostage to political consensus. Even when consensus exists, operational constraints such as limited troop numbers, vague rules of engagement, and dependence on host-state consent further undermine effectiveness on the ground.

Ultimately, the UN's record on the protection of civilians reveals both moral ambition and institutional limitation. From the Geneva Conventions to R2P, the international community has built an impressive framework of norms and resolutions intended to shield civilians from the horrors of war.

Yet these measures remain bound by the structural realities of the international system, a system designed to preserve state sovereignty above all else. The contradiction at the core of the UN Charter ensures that the organization is charged with defending humanity, yet constrained by the very states from which it derives its authority. As a result, civilian protection remains as much a political challenge as a humanitarian one, suspended between the ideals of international law and the realities of global power.

Major Current Conflicts

Gaza-Israel

The 7 October 2023 attack on Israel by Hamas caused the immediate deaths of an estimated 1600 Hamas attackers and 1200 Israelis, 797 of them civilians. Another 251 Israelis and foreigners, mostly civilians, were taken to Gaza as hostages, along with the bodies of 40 Israelis and foreigners killed in the attack and taken by Hamas.

The attack was start of fighting which lasted almost two years. Israel pledged to eliminate Hamas, which it fought in three previous conflicts. But fighting in Gaza, one of the more densely populated places anywhere, exposes Palestinian civilians to great danger from fighting and explosives.

Between October 2023 and 25 September 2025, at least 65,419 people were killed and 167,160 were injured, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health.¹⁸ Around 90 percent of Palestinians in

<https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/responsibility-protect/about>

¹⁶ "NATO and Libya (February - October 2011)," Site Name Seo, n.d.,

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_71652.htm

¹⁷ "Chairman Of Independent Inquiry into United Nations Actions During 1994 Rwanda Genocide

Presents Report to Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," 14 April 2000, <https://press.un.org/en/2000/20000414.sc6843.doc.html>

¹⁸ "Humanitarian Situation Update #326 | Gaza Strip | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory," United Nations Office for the

Gaza were displaced by the fighting, including aerial, ground, and maritime bombardment.¹⁹ Many Gazans survive in overcrowded displacement sites, in makeshift shelters, or tents in open spaces.

As of this writing, most fighting has ended, as a result of President Donald Trump's *Twenty Point Peace Plan*, announced 29 September 2025, endorsed by the UN Security Council on 17 November 2025.²⁰

Much of the criticism of Israeli tactics in Gaza focuses on the question of *proportionality*, the ratio of combatant to civilian dead and injured. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) say about one-third of the dead in Gaza were Hamas combatants. Many of casualties were women, children, or other civilians not directly involved in hostilities.



Palestinians receive humanitarian aid in Rafah, Gaza.²¹

Residential buildings, medical facilities, and aid infrastructure were repeatedly damaged or

destroyed, either as sites of fighting, or Hamas tunnels. Government buildings, hospitals, clinics and schools repeatedly became centers of fighting. Most shut down, sometimes destroyed. In at least one instance, a health facility was demolished, though previously evacuated, which the IDF claimed was being used by Hamas.

Food, water, medical supplies, and safe evacuation routes are severely constrained. There are reports of malnutrition-related deaths, especially among children. Many civilians are displaced multiple times. Tight restrictions, destroyed roads, and hostilities hamper humanitarian operations. Where "tactical pauses" in fighting were sometimes used to allow aid, these have been discontinued in some zones, further endangering civilians and aid workers.

Haiti

The collapse of governance and rise of control by rival gangs plunged Haiti into a severe crisis endangering much of the island's population. Nearly 1.3 million people are now internally displaced in Haiti, a 24 percent increase since December 2024, according to a recently published report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This surge represents the highest number of people displaced by violence ever recorded in the country.²²

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory, 25 September 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-326-gaza-strip>

¹⁹ The Associated Press, "Palestinian death toll tops 66,000 as Netanyahu prepares to meet Trump," *NPR*, 28 September 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/28/nx-s1-5555960/gaza-death-toll-over-66000>

²⁰ "Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan in full 9 October 2025", *BBC News*, 9 October 2025; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70155nke-d70>; Farnaz Fassihi, 'In major breakthrough, U.N.

Security Council adopts U.S. peace plan for Gaza', *New York Times*, 17 November 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/17/world/middleeast/un-security-council-gaza-peace-plan.html>

²¹ David Cameron, "Israel Must Act Now to Let Aid Through and Save Lives in Gaza," *The Guardian*, 12 January 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/11/israel-aid-gaza-britain-crossings-water-united-nations-food>

²² 'Haiti Sees Record Displacement as 1.3 Million Flee Violence', *UN Migration*, 11 June 2025,

At least 5,601 people were killed in Haiti last year as a result of gang violence, an increase of over 1,000 on the total killings for 2023, according to figures verified by the UN Human Rights Office. A further 2,212 people were injured and 1,494 kidnapped.²³

In one of the most deadly and shocking incidents in 2024, at least 207 people were killed in early December in a massacre orchestrated by the leader of the powerful Wharf Jérémie gang in the Cité Soleil area of Port-au-Prince. Many of the victims were older people accused of causing the death of the leader's son through alleged voodoo practices. To erase evidence, gang members mutilated and burned most of the bodies, while other bodies were thrown in the sea.²⁴

The UN Human Rights Office documented 315 lynchings of gang members and people allegedly associated with gangs, on some occasions reportedly facilitated by Haitian police officers, in 2024. In addition, there were 281 cases of alleged summary executions involving specialized police units between 1 January and 31 December 2024.²⁵

Sudan

Sudan now represents the largest recorded and fastest displacement crisis in the world. It is also the largest humanitarian crisis ever recorded.²⁶

Fighting broke out in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, on 15 April 2023 as an escalating power

struggle between the two main factions of the military regime finally turned deadly.

On one side are the Sudanese armed forces who remain broadly loyal to Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the country's de facto ruler. Against him are the paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a collection of militias who follow the former warlord Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti.²⁷

The RSF was founded by the former dictatorial ruler Omar al-Bashir as an Arab counterinsurgency militia. Bashir wanted to crush a rebellion in the region of Darfur that began more than 20 years ago due to the political and economic marginalization of the local population.



Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, at a rally in Abraq village, outside Khartoum, in June 2019. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

The conflict has plunged Sudan into what the UN has described as "one of the worst humanitarian nightmares in recent history". Tens

<https://www.iom.int/news/haiti-sees-record-displacement-13-million-flee-violence>

²³ 'Haiti: Over 5,600 killed in gang violence in 2024, UN figures show', *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 7 January 2025,

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/haiti-over-5600-killed-gang-violence-2024-un-figures-show>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ 'Crisis in Sudan: What is happening and how to help', *International Rescue Committee*, 5 November

2025, <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-sudan-what-happening-and-how-help>

²⁷ Rachel Savage, 'Sudan's civil war: how did it begin, what is the human cost, and what is happening now?' *Guardian*, 21 October 2024,

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/mar/22/what-caused-the-civil-war-in-sudan-and-how-has-it-become-one-of-the-worlds-worst-humanitarian-crises>

of thousands have died, millions have been displaced, and hunger and disease are rife.

According to the most recent figures, about 26 million people face severe food insecurity. Famine has been declared in the Zamzam displacement camp in Darfur.

About 11.3 million people have been forced to flee the fighting, including nearly 2.95 million who have fled across the country's borders. Most have gone to Chad and South Sudan, where underfunded aid agencies say they are struggling to meet basic needs. A UN appeal for \$1.51bn to support Sudanese refugees and their hosts in the region through the end of the year remains just 27 percent funded



Displaced Sudanese cross the border into Chad on 4 August 2023, where millions are already facing acute food insecurity. Photograph: Zohra Bensemra/Reuters

In its latest humanitarian update, published on 1 October, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said significant declines in vaccination rates and the destruction of health infrastructure resulting from the war mean Sudan is grappling with multiple disease outbreaks, including cholera, malaria, dengue fever, measles, and rubella. An estimated 3.4

million children under the age of five are at high risk of epidemic diseases, according to Unicef.

The conflict has also robbed huge numbers of an education. More than 90 percent of the country's 19 million school-age children are unable to access formal education. Schools have been targeted in airstrikes, occupied by armed groups and used to store weapons.

Ukraine-Russia

Since the Ukraine conflict accelerated with Russia's full-scale invasion on 22 February 2022, protection of civilians in Ukraine remains a severe challenge, with ongoing hostilities producing high civilian casualties, destruction of civilian and critical infrastructure, and persistent threats far beyond the frontline.

Russian attacks on civilian housing and infrastructure have been the direct cause of at least 14,054 casualties, including 730 children.²⁸ As of June 2025, deaths of Ukrainian soldiers were estimated at 60,000 and 100,000 personnel killed, with total casualties reaching approximately 400,000. Russian military deaths are estimated at 400,000.²⁹

Many civilian casualties are caused by missiles and loitering munitions, long-range strikes, aerial bombs, and drone attacks, especially in urban areas. These weapons often result in widespread damage and can affect civilians even in non-frontline regions. Hospitals have been targeted in multiple incidents, possibly deliberate in some cases.

Energy infrastructure, schools, and health facilities continue to be targeted or damaged, whether directly or as collateral damage.³⁰

²⁸ "Brutal Escalation of Large-Scale Russian Federation Attacks on Ukraine Setting Grim Casualty Records, Jeopardizing Fragile Diplomatic Momentum, Security Council Hears | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," 29 August 2025, <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16160.doc.htm>

²⁹ Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe, 'Russia's Battlefield Woes in Ukraine', *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 3 June 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine>

³⁰ Daria Tarasova-Marina and Tim Lister, "Millions of Ukrainians Face Dark and Cold After One of

Interruptions in power, water supply, and heating, especially in winter, exacerbate vulnerability.

Civilian populations near combat zones face repeated risk; many areas under either Ukrainian or Russian control are still under threat from munitions attacks.³¹ Displaced persons often suffer from damage to housing, infrastructure, and limited access to essential services.



In Western Ukraine, refugees make their way to the border to cross into Poland.³²

Role of the United Nations

The United Nations places the protection of civilians at the core of its work because it embodies the very principles upon which the organization was founded. The UN Charter emphasizes the maintenance of international peace and security, the promotion of human rights, and the advancement of human dignity, all of which are directly threatened when civilians are targeted in armed conflict.

First, legal obligations underpin the UN's concern. International humanitarian law, especially the Geneva Conventions, requires

warring parties to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, prohibiting deliberate attacks on civilians. As the guardian of these norms, the UN views civilian protection as essential to upholding the rule of law and preserving international humanitarian standards.

Second, the moral and humanitarian imperatives drive UN involvement. Civilians are the primary victims of modern conflicts, facing mass displacement, starvation, sexual violence, and indiscriminate attacks. Protecting them reflects the UN's commitment to human rights and the prevention of atrocities such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The memory of past failures, such as Rwanda and Srebrenica, has reinforced the UN's resolve to prioritize civilian protection as a moral responsibility and a credibility issue.

Third, strategic considerations make PoC critical to sustaining peace and security. Widespread civilian suffering fuels cycles of violence, creates refugee crises, and destabilizes entire regions. When civilians are left unprotected, conflicts are prolonged, extremist groups find fertile ground for recruitment, and fragile states collapse. By promoting PoC, the UN not only mitigates human suffering but also addresses the root causes of insecurity, supporting long-term stability.

Finally, PoC is central to the legitimacy of the UN itself. The organization exists to serve the world order, and civilian peace and stability is a large aspect of that. Failure to act in the face of mass atrocities erodes trust in the UN system, while visible efforts to safeguard civilians strengthen its credibility and influence. The protection of civilians is therefore both a normative obligation and a political necessity for the UN's role in the international system.

Russia's Largest Attacks on Energy Infrastructure," *CNN*, 10 November 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/08/europe/ukraine-russia-power-attack-intl>

³¹ Olivia Le Poidevin, "Cluster munitions cause more than 1,200 civilian casualties in Ukraine war, global monitor says," *Reuters*, 15 September 2025,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/cluster-munitions-cause-more-than-1200-civilian-casualties-ukraine-war-global-2025-09-15/>

³² "Ukraine One Year on, UNDSS in Action | United Nations," n.d. <https://www.un.org/en/un-department-safety-and-security/ukraine-one-year-undss-action>

Landmark UN Resolutions

The UN has taken significant steps to institutionalize the protection of civilians in armed conflict, making it a core part of its peace and security agenda. Over the past two decades, key Security Council resolutions have shaped the international framework for civilian protection, each reflecting the political and humanitarian priorities of its time.

Resolution 1265 (1999).³³ The first Security Council resolution to recognize the protection of civilians as essential to international peace and security. Adopted after failures in Rwanda and the Balkans, it called on all parties to respect international humanitarian law, ensure humanitarian access, and hold violators accountable. Though largely declarative, it marked a major turning point by institutionalizing civilian protection on the Council's agenda and setting the foundation for future policy and peacekeeping mandates.

Resolution 1296 (2000).³⁴ Building on Resolution 1265, Resolution 1296 reaffirmed the Council's commitment to civilian protection while emphasizing accountability and enforcement. It identified deliberate attacks on civilians and denial of aid as threats to international peace and security, paving the way for sanctions or international prosecutions. Although enforcement remained weak, it was the first resolution to connect humanitarian principles with concrete consequences, making accountability a core part of the PoC framework.

Resolution 1674 (2006).³⁵ Resolution 1674 expanded upon the UN's PoC framework by

endorsing the R2P, affirming the international community has a duty to act when states fail to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. This formalized R2P within the Security Council's agenda, linking civilian protection to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Resolution 2286 (2016).³⁶ Passed amid the Syrian War, Resolution 2286 condemned attacks on hospitals and medical workers, reaffirming their protection under international law. It demanded compliance with humanitarian norms and accountability for violations, recognizing the targeting of health facilities as a growing global crisis. 2286 stands as a commitment to safeguarding humanitarian space in modern warfare, especially for medical workers and facilities.

Country and Bloc Positions

Algeria focuses on Gaza, declaring 2024 as the deadliest year for civilians and humanitarian workers. It condemns Israel's military actions, displacement, and starvation tactics, urging the Security Council to act decisively to uphold international humanitarian law and end impunity.³⁷ Algeria will work to stop the Security Council from getting distracted in conflict issues elsewhere, such as Haiti, Sudan or Ukraine. It wants the Council to focus exclusively on Palestinian freedom and sovereignty. It opposes action on Sudan, where it supports the Islamist government.

Canada links the failure to protect civilians to political will rather than legal deficiency. It expresses support for peacekeeping operations as protective acts and reaffirmed the need to

³³ UN Security Council (1999)

³⁴ UN Security Council (2000)

³⁵ United Nations, "About the Responsibility to Protect | United Nations," n.d.

³⁶ "Security Council Adopts Resolution 2286 (2016), Strongly Condemning Attacks Against Medical Facilities, Personnel in Conflict

Situations", United Nations, 3 May 2016, <https://press.un.org/en/2016/sc12347.doc.htm>

³⁷ All country positions are based on "UN Security Council, "9921st Meeting UNSC," UN Press, 22 May 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/PV.9921>



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uphold existing humanitarian norms. Canada supports humanitarian protection in Gaza, Haiti and Sudan. It is especially determined that no Security Council resolution help Russia in Ukraine.

China urges an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, criticized double standards in applying humanitarian law, and promoted dialogue and negotiation to end conflicts. It co-launched a global initiative with Brazil, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Africa, and the ICRC to strengthen compliance with humanitarian law. Beijing also linked poverty reduction and development to long-term conflict prevention. China usually votes with Russia, now that the two are formal allies. China's primary goal is to make sure no Security Council resolution will limit its freedom of action against Taiwan or within China's own territory.

Denmark stresses accountability, support for the ICC, and adoption of instruments like the Safe Schools Declaration. It urges all states to uphold humanitarian law consistently, noting that protection cannot depend on political will or context. Denmark is especially determined that no Security Council resolution help Russia in Ukraine.

France called for strict adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, the fight against impunity through the International Criminal Court, and strong mandates for peacekeeping operations. It condemns Israeli restrictions on aid in Gaza, Russian aggression in Ukraine, and sexual violence in Sudan, framing civilian protection as a legal and moral responsibility of the Council. France is especially determined that no Security Council resolution help Russia in Ukraine.

Georgia reaffirms the importance of international humanitarian law, accountability, and protection of displaced persons, aligning itself with the European Union statement. It cited ongoing violations in Ukraine and elsewhere as evidence of the need for renewed compliance.

Greece emphasizes the global scale of conflicts and the need to reinforce protection mechanisms, including compliance with the UN Charter and the laws of war. Greece supports humanitarian protection in Gaza, Haiti and Sudan. It is especially determined that no Security Council resolution help Russia in Ukraine. It is more supportive of Palestinian issues than most other European governments.

Pakistan condemned attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers, particularly in Palestine and Kashmir, and urged the creation of global mechanisms to counter disinformation and prohibit autonomous weapons. It emphasizes accountability, foreign occupation, and the moral duty to protect civilians. Pakistan is especially determined that the Council aid the people of Gaza and promote progress toward a sovereign Palestinian state. It opposes action on Sudan, where it supports the Islamist government.

Panama condemns impunity and double standards in enforcing humanitarian law, welcoming ICC prosecutions and denouncing attacks on journalists and diplomats. It underscores that the protection of civilians is a universal, non-negotiable obligation. It is committed to humanitarian action in all on-going conflicts. It usually supports Non-Aligned positions, but facing pressure over its control of the Canal Zone, increasingly sides with the United States.

Russian Federation criticizes selective reporting and politicization of humanitarian issues, highlighting Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe and alleging bias in data attribution. It rejected Western framing of civilian protection and accused some states of using the UN to pursue geopolitical agendas, reflecting Moscow's ongoing deflection of accountability for Ukraine. Russia will try to focus international efforts to other conflicts, especially Gaza-Israel, where it has no great interest of its own.

Sierra Leone links conflict, climate change, and food insecurity, condemning the militarization of schools and hospitals. It supports African Union-led peace operations and called for better protection of journalists and aid workers. It reaffirms the need for stronger monitoring of Security Council resolutions on civilian protection.

Somalia highlights the dangers faced by humanitarian workers and journalists, supporting local peacebuilding and accountability. It calls for international cooperation to counter disinformation and protect civilians, particularly women and children.

Switzerland reaffirms its commitment to protecting civilians, especially children, and called for implementation of resolutions 2730 (2024) and 2761 (2024). It stresses the need for impartial accountability and universal application of humanitarian law, warning that selective enforcement undermines the UN's legitimacy.

The United Kingdom reaffirmed support for the ICC and full implementation of resolutions 2730 (2024) and 2286 (2016) protecting humanitarian workers. It underscores the need for peacekeepers to be well-equipped and for humanitarian access to be unhindered, emphasizing accountability and consistency in upholding humanitarian law. The UK is especially determined that no Security Council resolution help Russia in Ukraine.

The United States emphasizes the urgent need to reduce civilian harm and called for ceasefires in ongoing conflicts such as Sudan and Ukraine. It reaffirms commitment to humanitarian access and ending the suffering of civilians but avoided direct condemnation of specific actors, instead stressing the need for durable peace and negotiated settlements.

Under the leadership of President Donald Trump, the US will strongly support Israel and ensure that no Security Council resolution harms

Israel's freedom of action. On issues relating to Ukraine, the United States sometimes supports Russia, sometimes not.

Some Possible Proposals for Action

As sovereign countries, the Member States of the UN Security Council are free to develop the proposals they believe best serve the need of civilians in regions of conflict and their own individual national priorities. As the Security Council has shown in recent years, inaction is a possibility, when agreement cannot be found.

A range of proposals has been put forward to strengthen the UN's ability to protect civilians in armed conflict. These proposals build on past shortcomings while addressing new and emerging threats.

Strengthen Monitoring and Accountability.

One of the most pressing gaps in PoC is the lack of consistent accountability for perpetrators of civilian harm. To address this, member states could:

- Enact targeted sanctions against governments and non-state actors that deliberately sponsor or engage in violence against civilians.

- Launch fact-finding and monitoring missions under the Human Rights Council or the Secretary-General's authority to collect reliable data on violations of international humanitarian law.

- Increase the use of International Criminal Court (ICC) referrals, particularly in cases where atrocities are well-documented but national judicial systems are unwilling or unable to prosecute.

Monitoring will be especially favored by Member States trying to end conflicts rapidly. It will be opposed by those who want freedom of action for themselves (such as Russia) or their supporters (China will support Russia, the United States will support Israel).

Adopt a Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA). The use of heavy explosive weapons in cities and towns remains a leading cause of civilian casualties. A global political declaration could commit states to:

- Restrict or avoid the use of EWIPA in densely populated areas.
- Share best practices and military guidance on limiting collateral damage.
- Enhance post-strike accountability mechanisms, ensuring investigations when civilian harm occurs.

There is strong support for banning use of explosives in populated areas, an idea based on the Geneva Conventions. For the Security Council, though, it means confronting the tactics of all sides in all the armed conflicts considered here.

Actors using their armed forces, or allied to countries who so, in Gaza, Haiti, Sudan or Ukraine will hesitate before restricting their freedom of action. They will look at such a proposal as a thinly veiled effort to block their military progress, or weaken their allies. Winning their support may require limits of major, and painful, train-offs.

Protect Humanitarians and Journalists in armed conflict. Humanitarian workers and journalists are vital in conflict zones but are increasingly targeted. The UN could operationalize Security Council Resolution 2730 (2024) by:

- Establishing independent monitoring mechanisms to track and report attacks against aid workers and media personnel.
- Improve security coordination systems between UN missions, NGOs, and local communities.
- Offering technical and financial support for protective measures, including safe zones, communications equipment, and evacuation protocols.

While protecting all civilian will not win easy acceptance from governments engaged in armed conflict, or supping allies who are, there may be support for protection of these specific actors. There are complications. Many governments do not believe there is neutral or impartial humanitarianism or journalism.

Governments often want protection only for humanitarian actors and media they themselves control, and oppose any restraint on their ability to attack or intimidate humanitarians and media serving what they consider their opposition. Passing such a resolution may require difficult bargaining.

Enhance General Assembly Mechanisms. When the Security Council is paralyzed by political divisions, the General Assembly (GA) can provide an important alternative. Proposals include:

- More frequent use of the “Uniting for Peace” procedure, enabling the GA to recommend collective measures when the Council is deadlocked.
- Strengthening GA resolutions with clear implementation mechanisms, such as pooled funding commitments or standing commissions on civilian protection.

This proposal will be popular with the ten Security Council Member States with two-year rotating states. It will be especially popular with members of the Non-Aligned Movement, which always tries to move decision-making to the General Assembly, where they have overwhelming control, with 120 out of 193 votes. For the same reason, it will be strongly opposed by most or all five permanent Security Council Members, anxious to protect their veto.

Regulate Emerging Technologies. Technological development is creating new risks for civilians in conflict. To mitigate these, member states could:

Develop a framework on artificial intelligence in warfare, ensuring meaningful human control over AI-enabled weapons systems.

Establish international norms against autonomous lethal decision-making that bypass accountability.

Counter the spread of disinformation campaigns targeting civilians and aid agencies, which undermine trust in humanitarian actors and fuel violence.

This proposal will be especially popular with governments in regions of relative peace, not heavily invested in acquisition of new military technologies. It will be opposed by those with an interest in the development, deployment or export sale of these weapons. The Russian Federation, for example, will regard this as a poorly concealed effort to restrain its attacks in Ukraine. China will require an exception in case of hostilities in Taiwan. And the United States will protect Israel's freedom of action.

Focus attention on a specific conflict. Rather than aim to reduce civilian suffering from conflict everywhere, the Member States of the Security Council often prefer to focus on the international conflict of greatest concern to them. Conflicts in Haiti and Sudan may be easiest to gather support for action, and least likely to run into the barrier of a P5 veto.

For countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, Like Algeria, Pakistan, Panama and Sierra Leone, as well as China and the Russian Federation, sometimes, this usually means the conflict in Gaza, and singling Israel for special criticism. This already has been tried in a series of proposed resolutions.

Steadfast vetoes from the United States have made singularization of Israel impossible. A further complication is President Trump's *Twenty Point Peace Plan*, announced 29 September 2025, in effect as of this writing. Some Security Council Members may want to punish Israel, but they probably will avoid steps that might undermine the peace plan or their relations with the United States.

Advocates of Ukraine may try to build support for a resolution critical of Russia for its attacks on civilians there. This would be especially popular with. Countries like Canada, Denmark, France, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The United States is an uncertain actor in any process focusing on Russia, sometimes supporting Russia, sometimes supporting Ukraine. Russia, and probably its ally China, are almost certain to veto any resolution singularly critical of Russia.

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