

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): First of all, I would like to commend your delegation, Sir, for taking the initiative of convening this open debate on the protection of civilians and medical care in armed conflict, and for submitting a concept note (S/2017/365, annex) on the topic.

We also take note of the report of the Secretary General (S/2017/414) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and its recommendations.

Despite the important preventive and protection efforts that have been undertaken at the national and international levels, numerous challenges remain and civilians continue to suffer in situations of armed conflict. Azerbaijan strongly condemns all attacks against civilians, including attacks against the wounded and sick, medical and humanitarian personnel, hospitals, other medical facilities and humanitarian convoys. Efforts to prevent and resolve conflict and strengthen respect for international law have acquired importance today. As a matter of priority, special attention should be given to the implementation of resolutions adopted by the principal organs of the United Nations, in particular those relating to the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention and resolution.

Furthermore, the increasing brutality of armed conflicts and the changing nature of warfare have given rise to the need for greater measures for protection, including with regard to the humanitarian and medical mission. A critical element in that context is accountability for enhancing compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. Resolute and targeted measures are required to that end. Such measures must be free of selectivity and politically motivated approaches, however difficult or even unrealistic that may seem. Impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community contributes to instability and prevents the development of lasting solutions and the achievement of sustainable peace.

When national authorities fail to take the necessary steps to ensure accountability, the international community, particularly the Security Council, should play a more proactive role so as to ensure an appropriate response, including through support for national prosecutions, the establishment of ad hoc tribunals, hybrid mechanisms, international commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions. It is important that peace efforts never encourage, accept or tolerate situations achieved through the unlawful use of force and other egregious violations of international law, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Special attention must be given to the protection of civilians forced to leave their homes as a result of armed conflict. Azerbaijan supports continuing efforts to raise awareness of the problem of internal displacement and the right of return at the national and international levels. In that regard, we welcome the call of the Secretary-General on Member States to intensify efforts to tackle the root causes of forced displacement by preventing and resolving conflicts and strengthening respect for international law, including in protracted conflict.

My country's familiarity with the suffering of civilians in armed conflict is not based on hearsay. The continuing aggression of Armenia against my country has led to the temporary occupation of a significant part of Azerbaijan's territory, including the Nagorno Karabakh region, the seven adjacent districts and some exclaves. The war has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and ruined cities and livelihoods in my country. Serious violations of international humanitarian law amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide were committed by the Armenian side in the course of the aggression. Such violations include, inter alia, deliberate attacks against hospitals, schools, places of worship and other civilian objects, the killing of civilians, the taking and holding of hostages, the mistreatment and summary execution of prisoners of war and hostages, sexual violence, the extensive

destruction of inhabited areas and public and private property, pillaging and forced displacement.

The impunity still enjoyed by the perpetrators of the crimes committed in the course of the Armenian aggression not only impedes progress in achieving long-awaited peace and reconciliation between the two countries, but also aggravates the already difficult situation in the peace process. Moreover, despite the formal ceasefire, deliberate attacks against Azerbaijani civilians and civilian objects have become more frequent and more violent in recent times. Azerbaijan will spare no effort towards ending the unlawful occupation of its territories, achieving the political settlement of the conflict and ensuring peace and justice in the region.

In conclusion, we believe that it is essential that the Security Council consistently maintain its focus on the protection of civilians and systematically reiterate its demand that all parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international law.