

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): Let me begin by welcoming President Touadera to the Council and thanking him and Mr. Maurer for their briefings. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his remarks and for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447).

My conclusion from this debate so far, sadly, is that the protection of civilians in conflict is in crisis. Whether in Syria or in South Sudan, we are failing the most vulnerable when they need us the most — when they are being targeted in their homes, when they are being targeted in hospitals and even when they are being targeted by the very peacekeepers sent to protect them. The United Nations invented peacekeeping in order to prevent war, so civilians benefit hugely when peacekeeping works. But too often, peacekeeping is failing to live up to the high standards that victims rightly require.

Yesterday I met with Nadia Murad — the Yazidi woman whom I mentioned in my statement last week (see S/PV.7704). She told me, very movingly, how 19 girls were burned alive this week in her community. That is the barbarity that civilians now face. It is almost unspeakable. And yet she told me that she still has hope because she feels that justice is on her side. Our job today is to show people like Nadia that there is cause for hope — that we can and will protect civilians. I see four steps that we need to take.

First, we need to prepare peacekeepers for this seemingly impossible task. How can we best train, equip and deploy them? How can we ensure that they make a real difference to the communities that they are sent to protect? To answer those questions, we need to recognize that as threats to civilians change, so peacekeeping must change too. This means that all of us must look into the future so that we can better understand operating environments and the threats that civilians and peacekeepers face. New technology and better intelligence can help, but to maximize impact and sustainability personnel need to be trained and equipped to use those new tools.

President Obama's summit on peacekeeping last September successfully increased the quantity of peacekeepers available to the United Nations. We now need to improve the overall quality. The United Nations needs a mechanism to choose only those troops who can definitively protect civilians effectively, and to replace those who are unable or unwilling to fulfil their mandated tasks. In that way, we can create a new generation of peacekeeping — one with the protection of civilians at its heart.

Secondly, the tragedies of Syria, South Sudan and Yemen show that there needs to be better compliance with international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General's report makes clear that strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law is a prerequisite for improving the protection of civilians. Those laws

are binding on all sides of any conflict. They strike a balance between military necessity and basic humanity. When those laws are breached, everyone loses.

The primary responsibility for complying with those laws lies with the parties to conflict, as the Secretary-General and, indeed, my Russian colleague reminded us today. When they starve and besiege, when they attack schools and hospitals, or when they impeded humanitarian access, we see unimaginable suffering, populations fleeing, economies collapsing, a whole country left staring into the abyss.

We recognized at the World Humanitarian Summit that the humanitarian system needs reform. I am pleased that the Summit included a renewed commitment to international humanitarian law. However — and this is my third point — to deter future breaches of international humanitarian law, we need greater accountability for when there is no compliance, or when the protection of civilians is ignored or violated. The Secretary-General talks of a pervasive lack of accountability. That must be tackled. States must investigate crimes that occur in their jurisdiction. When they cannot or will not, international mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court have an important role to play.

Accountability is crucial to improving the protection of civilians in peacekeeping. Enhanced reporting mechanisms are needed, including independent mission observers. Commanders must monitor for violations and missions should work closely with local communities and non-governmental organizations. They all must be able to report their findings independently and regularly to us. There is no greater need for accountability than for those sexually exploited and abused by peacekeepers — those who have been betrayed by the people sent to protect them. Through resolution 2272 (2016), we pledged to tackle the scourge, but to make progress we need a commitment from the entire international community to making zero tolerance a reality.

My final point is that the protection of civilians is not confined to those under attack. It extends to those who risk everything to flee across land and sea to find refuge. So we welcome the Secretary-General's report on large movements of refugees and migrants (A/70/59) and the planning under way for the high-level events of the General Assembly. Together we need to deliver a framework for better global management of migration, one that places greater emphasis on global responsibility-sharing to provide real protection for refugees. I hope that we can build on the London-Syria conference commitments and the compact of ideas, and find comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

Let me close by stressing that the United Kingdom is committed to playing our part to enhance the protection of civilians. It is why we have deployed personnel to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Somalia and South Sudan in recent weeks, and it is

why we are hosting a peacekeeping defence ministerial meeting in September. Because through those commitments, and more — everything else that we are doing — I believe that we can help Nadia and all civilians under threat, across the world, so that they too can have hope; so that they too can believe that justice is on their side.