

**Mr. Maurer:** I thank the Council for giving me the opportunity to address it again in this important debate today.

War equals destruction — the destruction of the enemy, of military targets, of assets and of infrastructure. It might be regrettable, but it is not prohibited under international humanitarian law and therefore has to be accepted. What we cannot accept — what we must not accept — is that war destroys the lives of countless civilians. The protection of civilians lies at the heart of international humanitarian law and at the heart of the missions of both the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Peacekeepers are often deployed on the front lines of armed conflict with increasingly robust mandates. We know this because in many places, from South Sudan to Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ICRC works right alongside them. Since the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone in 1999, the Organization's mandates have increasingly included the protection of civilians, and I commend the Council for its commitment to using the resources at its disposal to ensure that people affected by conflict are spared whenever and however possible.

The deployment of peace missions in violent environments, with robust mandates, inevitably raises the question of when and under which conditions international humanitarian law applies to them. I believe that this legal discussion of a technical nature should not preclude anyone from aiming for the highest standards, at all times, and that means impeccable respect for international humanitarian law.

The more than 120,000 members of the United Nations forces form, in theory, the world's third largest army, and they are standard setters. Their exposure to some of the worst atrocities in human history, from Rwanda to Bosnia, from South Sudan to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Somalia today, means that their actions can make a difference in the most difficult situations. They are held to the highest of standards, and where they fail, for whatever reason, the Council, as the organ responsible for establishing peacekeeping missions, must draw the appropriate conclusions and act on them in cooperation with the troop-contributing countries concerned, including on allegations of sexual violence against children and the murder of civilians, which have recently received media attention.

All delegations know that the ICRC works on the front lines of armed conflicts around the world, and my organization is often among the last international humanitarian actors staying on the ground, close to the people. What we know from being close to people, in over 80 countries, is that communities possess tremendous strengths, particularly in times of fragility and emergency. Neither humanitarians nor peacekeepers must limit or prevent

the empowerment of people. After all, it is the people in the communities who know their environment and the changing dynamics best. I have myself seen remarkable examples of local men and women negotiating access for humanitarian organizations, for instance. There is a role for peacekeepers in community engagement, as the Secretary-General also highlighted ahead of today's meeting. Peacekeepers must create and support those spaces in which locals can negotiate.

As close as peacekeepers and humanitarians are to each other geographically in the field, it is of vital importance for the ICRC to be perceived and understood as the strictly neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian organization that it is. Any kind of confusion or blurring between the political mandate of peacekeeping missions and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's principles can potentially jeopardize our access to people in need and risk the lives of my colleagues. We will continue to protect our distinctiveness so as to ensure that we can deliver to the best of our abilities to people suffering in wars, and we ask peacekeepers and the Council to do the same. We will continue to rely on our own security protocols, which are not based on weaponized security, but on engagement with and consensus among all those bearing arms, and transparency about our strictly needs-based action. We also want to continue to work with peacekeeping missions, troop- and police-contributing countries and the United Nations Secretariat to further build on the fruitful cooperation that we have established over decades.

We are ready to increase in volume and depth our training programmes on international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians for peacekeepers, ahead of deployment and in theatre, and to strengthen our protection dialogue with all parties. We are ready to engage on the front lines of conflict and with all those bearing arms to find arrangements through which civilians are protected and international humanitarian law is respected. Often the first step towards better protection is by rebuilding minimal trust among belligerents across contact lines.

Through our substantial experience in the area of detention, we can assist the Council in preparing for those moments when peacekeepers will likely have to arrest and detain persons. We have seen in the past that preparation is more fruitful than scrambling in an emergency. We need the necessary protocols and procedures on detention, transfer and access for ICRC to be in place before operations start.

There are other active measures that the Council can take for the effective protection of civilians. The Council can scale up peacekeepers' presence where necessary, so as to effectively deter violence and adequately train, equip and resource peacekeepers so they can do their job; develop model operating procedures for mixed peacekeeping missions; ensure the highest standards of behaviour; and lastly, as stated in the Geneva

Conventions, respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, at all times, including neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action.