



## Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians, 23 May 2023

Malta Statement delivered by His Excellency George Vella,  
President of the Republic of Malta

---

Thank you, Excellency

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the Swiss Presidency for convening this meeting on the protection of civilians, and extend my thanks to the Secretary-General H.E. Antonio Guterres, ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, and all the other previous speakers for their inspiring briefings this morning.

The lives of millions of civilians worldwide continue to be impaired by a multitude of crises, including conflict-induced hunger, targeted violence, displacement, and climate change.

From the Central African Republic to Afghanistan, from Myanmar to Ethiopia, the correlation between conflict and hunger is evident.

Millions are battling crisis levels of hunger resulting from the scourge of war and armed conflict; a grim reality that this Council acknowledged when it unanimously adopted Security Council Resolution 2417 in 2018.

Since the 15th of April, more than seven hundred thousand people have fled Sudan in fear. The direct cause of fear is from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Fear of hospitals being deliberately targeted



in conflict zones. Fear of being denied access to desperately needed humanitarian assistance.

In Haiti, extreme levels of gang violence have worsened existing, underlying crises, with 600 people killed in Port-au-Prince last month alone. Increasing numbers of women and children have become victims of homicides, sexual and gender-based violence, and kidnappings.

In Syria today, protracted conflict has reduced the basic and essential infrastructure which populations rely on to survive, to rubble. It has pushed children out of school and into early, forced marriages. Cholera is now widespread. Clean water sources have been defiled, agricultural land contaminated, and electricity supply cut.

The number of civilian deaths, including those of women and children, in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories including Gaza, remains unacceptable. The indiscriminate firing of rockets and the killing of civilians are also unacceptable.

Demolitions, evictions, and other violent incidents continue to heighten tensions and exacerbate an already perilous situation.

The war in Ukraine continues to severely impact the civilian population both in Ukraine and beyond, and is compounding already-existing global food insecurity. We are now witnessing a renewed period of violence in



the country which will yield yet more deaths and destruction on an industrial scale.

Mr President

In all of these crises and complex humanitarian emergencies, the protection of civilians, and sustained humanitarian access and support, must be safeguarded by this Council.

Arbitrary, discriminatory, and bureaucratic impediments that hinder the rapid delivery of vital aid are unacceptable, as without timely humanitarian access there can be no meaningful humanitarian response.

In this regard, given that sanctions, unless targeted, may have adverse and unintended humanitarian consequences, directly or indirectly, on innocent civilian populations, we welcome the recent adoption of Resolution 2664 which provides for a humanitarian exemption for all UN sanctions.

Monitoring to ensure civilians do not inadvertently pay the price by suffering unintended consequences for the actions of the sanctioned, is our collective responsibility.

President



The restrictions on Afghan women's mobility and from working and giving their services to the United Nations and NGOs have severely impacted humanitarian operations across the country.

Discriminatory requirements placed on female Yemeni aid workers have delayed and suspended critical missions and programmes.

We must ensure that throughout these times of unspeakable, irrational horror, the fundamental respect for human rights and human dignity remains.

Malta reiterates that in all of these crisis settings around the globe:

Civilians are not and should never be a target.

The humanitarian workers, helpers and volunteers who aid them are not a target. Objects and services that are indispensable to the survival of civilian' populations are not and should not be a target.

These distinctions are clear. Never can it be said that we did not know.

Mr President

Malta welcomes the news of an agreement reached by the parties to renew the Black Sea Grain Initiative for a period of another two months, and I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his dedicated efforts in this regard.



Unfortunately, we have already witnessed the impact caused by the disruption of agricultural exports from this region on vulnerable markets far away in the Horn of Africa and the Levant. Is it crucial that this lifeline is guaranteed and remains in place as long as it is needed. The world should not be blackmailed by hunger.

Hunger should never be brandished as a weapon in any conflict.

Mr President

Looking to the future, I would like to make the three following points:

First, this Council must take seriously its obligations on ensuring accountability for those who have violated international law, and in particular, those who have ordered or participated in the destruction, or prevented the functionality of, civilian infrastructure which is critical for the production and availability of food.

White Notes, as detailed in Resolution 2417, must be issued in a swift manner for them to be acted upon at this Council. We must stop conflict-induced hunger before it becomes too late.

Second, the UN can work closer with warring parties, particularly those of states, to ensure the adequate *deconfliction* of infrastructure, be it products or services, which are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Such deconfliction programmes can act as an



additional layer of protection. However, they must not be treated as a substitute for the parties' adherence and due diligence to their own obligations under international law.

Third, it is not enough to rely solely on emergency humanitarian food assistance in the crises of our times. We know that early, time-sensitive support and interventions with farmers, fishers, herders, and foresters, whose basic means of survival have been affected by conflict or climate, have enormous positive impacts on the availability of nutrition in such emergencies. We must seek to scale up both emergency food assistance and protect agricultural production in emergencies for the maximum benefit of populations. Finally, we must increase funding for humanitarian responses.

The world's military expenditure is at an all-time high of 2.24 trillion dollars in 2022, while the UN's Humanitarian Response Plans which require 51 billion dollars for 2023, are struggling to be funded.

A poor reflection of our global multilateral system and the values we are meant to uphold.

Besides, we must avoid seeing arms and ammunition continuously and regularly arriving in conflict zones, while civilians in these zones are threatened by hunger, if not death, because humanitarian convoys cannot reach them.



THE PERMANENT MISSION  
OF MALTA TO THE UN NEW YORK



**Malta**  
2023-2024

UNITED NATIONS  
SECURITY COUNCIL

The pain, cries, and the lament of so many men, women, and children must be heard and heeded. The world relies on the work and leadership of this Council to protect the most vulnerable from harm, suffering or worse.

I thank you.