



Security Council open debate on the Protection of Civilians, 21 May 2024

Malta Statement delivered by Her Excellency Ambassador Vanessa Frazier
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

President

I begin by thanking Mozambique for organising today's open debate on this topic of great importance. I also thank USG Alice Wairimu Nderitu, ASG Joyce Msuya, ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, and Mr. Khadhraoui for the reality check they have given us this morning, but also for their words of hope.

Resolution 1265 constitutes a landmark text in our collective commitment to the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict. As we commemorate the 25th Anniversary of its adoption, we must carefully reflect on the current reality for civilians trapped in conflict around the globe and address the significant challenges we face in the implementation of Resolution 1265 today.

President

Just as in 1999, civilians are not just victims of war: they are regarded as instruments of war.



Across the globe, the starvation, rape, torture, terrorising, and murder of civilians are still seen as legitimate.

Neither sex nor age serves as a defence. Today, just as in 1999, women, children, and the elderly continue to be disproportionately impacted by conflict.

Resolution 1265 emerged from one of the darkest periods in recent history, with the international community reeling from the horrors of genocides like in Rwanda, and severe humanitarian crises in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Angola, and East Timor. Its adoption marked a pivotal moment in our understanding and response to the plights of civilians caught in the crossfires of war. It signalled a commitment to our shared humanity.

Regrettably, over the course of the past 25 years, this commitment waned. Despite the development of the vast range of instruments our multilateral system has to offer when it comes to protecting civilians, rarely have they been used in a timely and effective manner.



Over the past 25 years we have seen this in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, Haiti, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen just to name a few. Today, this failure continues.

In Gaza, thousands of civilians have been killed or injured in the past six months. An entire population faces man-made starvation. Nearly all hospitals in Gaza have been systematically dismantled. The scale of human suffering is an affront to everything the United Nations stands for.

In Sudan, we are witnessing the largest refugee and internal displacement crisis in the world. Fear of the ethnic cleansings which took place in 2005 appear to be reemerging, while conflict-induced hunger stalks some 18 million people. The RSF is encircling the city of El Fasher in Darfur, as close to one million IDPs face a potential massacre that we must avert.

President

While we have developed robust frameworks and tools since Resolution 1265, the gap between our ideals and the reality on the ground persists.



The hard lessons we have learned from past genocides underscore the vital role of accountability. Without it, our resolutions are merely words.

It is imperative that the Council utilises every tool at its disposal to ensure compliance with international laws designed to protect civilians. At the same time, humanitarian solutions will not supplant the critical need for true diplomacy, and brave political decision making.

As we reflect on the past 25 years, let us reaffirm our commitment to the principles enshrined in Resolution 1265, ensuring they are more than aspirations but realities for the millions of civilians whose lives depend on our actions.

Let us not be passive when confronted with the idea that might is right.

In the words of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan in briefing this Council 25 years ago, 'those who founded the United Nations believed that, despite a bloodied history, humanity was ultimately redeemable'.



As committed multilateralists, these inspiring words of hope continue to serve as our guiding light. We stand firm in our belief that dialogue, and diplomacy, hold the key to the challenges we continue to face. Cynicism must never be allowed to prevail.

In reaffirming our commitment to Resolution 1265, let us translate our words into action. [In this regard, we commend the work of Switzerland in drafting a new Resolution on the protection of civilians and those who assist them in conflict and hope to see this text finalised and adopted by consensus in the coming days.]

To conclude, by operating with bravery, justice, and consistency, we can protect the most vulnerable in conflict zones and restore the credibility of this Council in the eyes of the world.

I thank you.