



PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

by

H. E. Mr. Michal Mlynár

**Permanent Representative of Slovakia
to the United Nations**

**Open Debate of the UN Security Council
on
Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts**

**27 May 2020
New York**

Mr. President,

Slovakia aligns itself to the statement of the European Union and hereby presents a few additional reflections in the national capacity.

The current crisis of COVID-19 raises not only global health and socio-economic concerns, but it also impacts the protection of civilians in armed conflict. While already in a vulnerable situation, the pandemic puts them even at higher risk. COVID-19 exacerbates their suffering caused by conflicts, and vice-versa, can potentially lead to more conflicts arising.

Therefore, the call by the UN Secretary-General on Global Ceasefire is very timely and acute, and Slovakia strongly supports it and urges all parties to conflict to respond to it positively. We appreciate also the other guiding tools for Member States to ensure that human rights are at the center of the response to the pandemic, including the policy briefs on COVID-19 and human rights, the impact of COVID-19 on women and children, and the guidance note on addressing and countering COVID-19-related hate speech. The Call to Action for Human Rights, issued last February, is of key importance as well.

We have witnessed the impact of COVID-19 on peace operations. This includes limitations of troop rotations and restrictions of movement in order to protect health, safety and security of UN personnel. This unfortunately obstructs their basic task - to maintain peace and security, where deployed. Often civilians pay the highest price for this. They remain at risk of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, which continues at shocking levels. The COVID-19 pandemic poses extreme risks for women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected situations, particularly as the pandemic makes it more difficult for protection to be provided and for humanitarian workers to reach the vulnerable populations. Women and women's organizations should be at the centre of the response to the pandemic, and the socio-economic plans should be designed with the lives and future of women and girls in mind.

Slovakia, as an active troop and police contributor to the UN missions, endorsed the Declaration of Shared Commitments in September 2018 and remains committed to work further on their implementation, including through effective performance and responsible and disciplined conduct of our peacekeepers in UN missions and operations. We subscribed to the initiatives such as the Kigali principles to protect civilians, Vancouver Principles and the Secretary-General's voluntary compact to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse. The President of the Slovak Republic, H. E. Ms. Zuzana Čaputová is one of the 87 members of the Secretary-General's Circle of Leadership on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping operations.

International law is essential for the protection of civilians, and strengthening compliance with its norms, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, can significantly contribute to avoiding civilian deaths, suffering and displacement. All state and non-state parties to conflicts must abide by their obligations under international law. States should establish appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements to comprehensively address violations of IHL and hold those who commit violations accountable.

We strongly support the International Criminal Court, and its role in the fight against impunity and bringing perpetrators to justice. Achieving universal jurisdiction of the ICC would be a major step in ensuring accountability for violations at the national, regional and international level. We, once again, urge all UN Member States that have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Rome Statute.

It is also important to highlight the role of the security sectors. If reformed and well governed, it can significantly contribute to the respect for human rights, political dialogue, arms control, as well as to the protection of civilians, which is the foundation of any state. The security sector plays a key role in preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation or recurrence of armed conflict, which are the most effective tools to protect

civilians. Slovakia is a long-standing supporter of the Security Sector Governance and Reform agenda and is fully committed to continue co-chairing the UN Group of Friends of SSR, together with South Africa.

Protection of civilians is not only upon warring parties, but it's also on governments that should find the so much needed political will and support, to ensure better todays and tomorrows for those unwillingly affected by armed conflict.

Thank you, Mr. President.