



# AUSTRALIA



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**UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**

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## **The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Including Healthcare in Conflict**

**Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative  
of Australia to the United Nations**

*(Check against delivery)*

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Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's focus on prevention. This is undoubtedly the best long-term strategy for protecting civilians. But where these efforts fail, the protection of civilians must remain our highest priority.

The reason is obvious. Already this year we have witnessed frequent, direct, as well as indiscriminate, attacks against civilians. We have witnessed the arbitrary denial of consent to humanitarian access. We have witnessed utter contempt for human rights. We have witnessed this in conflicts around the world, including in South Sudan and Yemen, but most especially in Syria.

Like others have said today, Australia is particularly alarmed by the frequency, severity and deliberate nature of attacks against healthcare. Today's briefers, like those who have gone before them, have painted a heartbreaking picture of realities on the ground and provided dire warnings about the risks of failing to implement Resolution 2286 in full. For this reason, we commit to doing our part to translate Resolution 2286 from rhetoric to action.

We applaud the Secretary-General's statement that he will facilitate a global effort to mobilise Member States, civil society and other stakeholders to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. We are in full agreement that, as a priority, this must include responding to serious violations, including by holding perpetrators to account.

Mr President, for good reason, the UN's scorecard on the protection of civilians is one of the litmus tests of the organisation's effectiveness – and, frankly, credibility. Australia therefore expects the Members of this Council to support timely and decisive action aimed at preventing or ending the commission of mass atrocities, consistent with the ACT Code of Conduct and the French/Mexican initiative on veto restraint.

UN peacekeeping operations that have been given a protection mandate must prioritise implementation. Despite the significant

growth of POC doctrine and guidance, performance across peacekeeping operations remains mixed.

The High-Level Panel on Peace Operations emphasised that protection mandates must be a mission-wide task, utilising every tool at a Mission's disposal, including non-traditional strategies such as unarmed civilian protection. The Independent Special Investigation into South Sudan stressed the importance of a forward-leaning, highly mobile posture and conducting robust, dismounted day and night patrolling. All peacekeepers must be empowered, and supported, by both the UN and troop and police contributing countries, to act in accordance with their protection responsibilities.

To assist in these efforts, Australia has provided support to DPKO to disseminate POC guidelines and policies. We have also endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which we consider provide useful guidance to peacekeepers.

In closing, Mr President, let me pay tribute to those in the field trying to provide protection to civilians, often at great risk to themselves. Together with those they are trying to protect, the very least these brave men and women deserve is our respect and protection.