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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SIXTH COMMITTEE,
SEVENTY-FIRST SESSION, AGENDA ITEM 82,
STATUS OF THE PROTOCOLS ADDITIONAL TO THE GENEVA
CONVENTIONS OF 1949 AND RELATING TO THE PROTECTION OF
VICTIMS IN ARMED CONFLICT

STATEMENT BY MS. AHILA SORNARAJAH
FIRST SECRETARY (LEGAL AFFAIRS)
UNITED KINGDOM MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

10 OCTOBER 2016

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Mr Chairman,

The United Kingdom welcomes the report of the Secretary General on the status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts. The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union.

The United Kingdom believes that International Humanitarian Law protects innocent victims from the devastating impact of armed conflicts. It is tragic that these laws of war are increasingly ignored, both by state and non-state groups, most notably in Syria where the consequences have been horrific. We call for better implementation of, and better compliance with, the existing framework. Both States and non-state groups, alike, must be held accountable whenever International Humanitarian Law is breached.

The United Kingdom welcomes the outcome of the 32nd International Conference on the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in Geneva in December 2015, including the adoption of resolutions on Strengthening Compliance with IHL, Health Care in Danger, Sexual and Gender Based Violence and the Safety and Security of Humanitarian Volunteers. We also welcome follow up to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.

The International Red Committee of the Red Cross plays a crucial role in the international system. The United Kingdom pays tribute to the ICRC, the British Red Cross and the wider Red Cross and Red Crescent movement for the courageous work they do to provide assistance to the most vulnerable of people, in the most dangerous of environments. Their emblems, which are established under International Humanitarian Law, are symbols of neutral protection. It is therefore a matter of grave concern that these emblems are not being honoured as they should, and that humanitarian workers and medical personnel have been killed while trying to administer help to the wounded and sick.

The United Kingdom has made a detailed submission on its recent work to both implement and promote international humanitarian law, which is reflected in the Secretary General's report. However, there are three points we wish to highlight.

Firstly, the United Kingdom continues to be at the forefront of international efforts to increase the recognition of serious sexual violence as major crimes under International Humanitarian Law. In 2015, Baroness Anelay of St John's DBE was appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. I am pleased to confirm that Baroness Anelay has been re-appointed to this role by our new Prime Minister. This reflects the United Kingdom Government's continued commitment to combating sexual violence in conflict. We are also proud that the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, which we launched in 2014, has so far been endorsed by 156 States.

Secondly, in May 2016, the United Kingdom Government introduced legislation into the House of Lords which will enable the United Kingdom to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and accede to its two Protocols. The UK has also committed £30million of funding to a new Cultural protection fund. The fund will seek to support countries in global conflict zones to protect and restore their cultural heritage. Together, the ratification of the Hague Convention and the Cultural Protection Fund will create a package of measures which underline the United Kingdom's strong commitment to protecting cultural heritage for future generations.

Third, the United Kingdom will be hosting an Article 36 Weapons Review Conference later this year, in order to better understand and share best practice in this area of international humanitarian law. This is intended to build on a similar conference we held in September 2015, in which the methodologies used to ensure weapons are capable of legal use, were discussed.

Finally, the United Kingdom wishes to reiterate its strong support for the International Criminal Court, the ad hoc international criminal tribunals and other courts established to address serious violations of IHL. The UK's continuing support for the ICC is based on joint principles: the need to end impunity, ensure accountability and see justice done, as well as the importance of preventing further atrocities. Ending impunity is an essential step towards building a safer world for all.

Mr Chairman, the United Kingdom remains fully committed to International Humanitarian Law and to ensuring it is enforced, and that its principles are protected.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.