

Mr./ Madam Chair,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country Sweden.

The Nordic countries would like to welcome the Report of the Secretary-General (A/79/174) on the status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts, and the useful update it provides. The universalization and full implementation of the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols is central to ensuring compliance.

Mr./ Madam Chair,

This year brings with it the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Although much has changed over these 75 years, armed conflicts still plague our world, which has been painfully visible over these last few years. The importance of respecting and upholding international humanitarian law is as important as ever. When adhered to, the rules enshrined in these conventions form a strong protection for those who find themselves affected by armed conflict. This was true when drafting the conventions, and it is still true today. Civilians are never a legitimate target of military attacks. Intentional attacks on civilians and civilian objects violate the laws of war and the same applies to the use of weapons and methods that have indiscriminate effects.

Delivery of assistance to the affected populations must be ensured. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other humanitarian organizations play a vital role and we must do what we can to safeguard their important mandate to deliver support in a neutral, impartial and independent way.

International humanitarian law is clear when it comes to occupation. The occupying Power must ensure the safety and welfare of the population. Furthermore, the occupying Power shall preserve the *status quo ante* in the occupied territory. Annexations are unlawful and shall therefore be considered null and void.

Mr./Madam Chair,

Serious violations of international humanitarian law must be investigated and those responsible held to account. This is important for the victims who deserve justice and redress but also to prevent and deter future violations. Efforts to this end must be made on primarily the domestic level, but the international community can and should help where possible with financial or in-kind support or by exercising universal jurisdiction and starting own structural preliminary investigations.

The Nordic countries fully support the International Criminal Court in fighting impunity, by investigating and prosecuting the most serious international crimes.

Mr./ Madam Chair,

That “in war, truth is the first casualty” has sadly been proven over and over again. Independent information sharing and access for journalists to conflict zones is crucial in this regard. Shutting down internet and hindering and threatening members of the press from reporting is a violation of IHL. We are deeply concerned by the risks journalists must endure to uphold the freedom of the press. We commend these journalists, who on a daily basis defy threats and violence for our right to impartial information.

Mr./Madam Chair,

Persons of different genders can be affected by armed conflict in different ways. This influences their needs, capacities and perspectives in situations of armed conflict. Promoting practices that take account of these differences in order to safeguard adequate protection for all, independently of a person’s gender is key. In this regard, we welcome the recent report on International Humanitarian Law and a Gender Perspective in the Planning and Conduct of Military Operations published by ICRC, the Swedish Red Cross, and the Nordic Centre for Military. The report provides guidance as to how gendered harm arising from military operations can be better understood and sets out good practices to avoid and reduce it.

The Nordic Governments have a long engagement in issues concerning protection of the environment in armed conflicts. Armed conflicts may cause serious damage to the environment and have severe and long-lasting consequences both to the nature and to populations that depend on it. Environmental effects of armed conflict also continue to be felt in its aftermath, sometimes for decades or longer, and timely action to address them may prevent greater harm and facilitate the transition to a sustainable peace. Protection of the environment is therefore necessary to effectively protect civilian population in times of armed conflict. Increased awareness of international law protecting the environment in areas affected by armed conflict is necessary.

Thank you.