

**Permanent Mission of India
New York**

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Annual UNSC Open Debate on “Protection of civilians in armed conflict”

Statement by Ambassador Harish Parvathaneni, Permanent Representative
20 May 2026

Thank you Mr. President,

We congratulate China on assuming the UNSC Presidency for this month and also welcome convening this annual open debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. We thank the Secretary General for his report and the briefers for their insightful remarks this morning.

2. India reaffirms its strong commitment to the UN Charter and stresses that protecting civilians at all times, including conflict situations, is a central element of maintenance of international peace and security. In 2025, recorded civilian deaths across twenty armed conflicts was more than 37,000. Although this is the first decline after three years of steady increase, the numbers are still high. Continued civilian casualties, displacement, destruction of critical infrastructure and attacks on hospitals, schools, medical personnel and humanitarian workers remain deeply concerning.

3. India calls for zero tolerance to the loss of civilian lives. Parties to armed conflict must ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access while respecting international humanitarian law. Even a decade after adoption of UNSC Resolution 2286, repeated attacks on civilian facilities and humanitarian workers reflect a serious erosion of respect for international humanitarian law. India reiterates that medical personnel and humanitarian workers must be protected at all times.

Mr. President,

4. As highlighted in the UNSG’s report, the use of missiles, bombs and other explosive weapons in cities and populated areas remain a major cause of civilian harm. The growing trend of use of drones to deploy explosive weapons in urban areas is especially concerning. The use of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and autonomous systems by parties to conflict must be in conformity with international law and humanitarian principles. Safeguards must be in place to prevent misuse and unintended harm to civilians. Protection of civilians cannot be achieved through humanitarian responses alone. The targeted use of violence against civilians to achieve political objectives including terrorism, must be addressed comprehensively.

5. India remains deeply concerned about the persistent threat posed by cross-border terrorism, which continues to undermine regional peace, stability, and the fundamental principles of international security. India has been a victim of such form of terrorism for decades. States that sponsor, shelter or support terrorism must be held accountable. India has consistently emphasized that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations remains one of the gravest threats to civilians worldwide. No cause or grievance can justify deliberate attacks against civilians

Mr. President,

6. It is ironic that Pakistan, with its long-tainted record of genocidal acts, has chosen to refer to issues that are strictly internal to India. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has reported that in the first three months of 2026, 750 civilian deaths and injuries were documented in Afghanistan as a result of cross border armed violence perpetrated by Pakistani military forces, most of which occurred due to air strikes. The UNAMA documentation attributed 94 of 95 incidents of civilian casualties to Pakistani Security forces. The world has not forgotten that it was during the holy month of Ramadan in March this year, at a time of peace, reflection, and mercy, that Pakistan conducted a barbaric airstrike on the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital in Kabul. Again, according to UNAMA, this cowardly and unconscionable act of violence claimed the lives of 269 civilians and injured a further 122 in a facility which can by no means be justified as a military target. It is hypocritical to espouse high principles of international law while targeting innocent civilians in the dark. The air strikes by Pakistan occurred at the conclusion of *tarawih* evening prayers, when numerous patients were leaving the *masjid*, as per UNAMA. It bears emphasis that the UN Secretary General called on member states to uphold their international obligations in relation to protection of civilians, including the principle of non-refoulement in the context of Afghanistan. Clearly, Pakistan has chosen to ignore this call completely.

7. As per UNAMA, over 94,000 people were assessed as displaced due to cross border armed violence perpetrated against Afghan civilians. But, such heinous acts of aggression by Pakistan should not come as a surprise from a country that bombs its own people and conducts systematic genocide. During Operation Searchlight in 1971, Pakistan sanctioned the systematic campaign of genocidal mass rape of 400,000 women citizens by its own army. Such inhuman conduct reflects Pakistan's repeated attempts over decades to externalize internal failures through increasingly desperate acts of violence both within and beyond its borders. With no faith, no law, and no morality the world can see through Pakistan's propaganda.

Mr. President,

8. In conclusion, India reiterates that the protection of civilians must remain at the center of the Security Council's efforts to maintain international peace and security. The

international community must collectively work to restore and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, strengthen accountability, ensure humanitarian access, protect medical care, responsibly govern emerging technologies and thereby alleviate the suffering of civilians affected by armed conflict.

I thank you, Mr. President.