

**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

Intervention by

H.E. Jeroen Cooreman, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of Belgium  
to the United Nations

**UNSC Open Arria Formula Meeting**

**« Protecting Medical Care in Armed Conflict –  
from Policy to Practice »**

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Mister President,  
Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank Sweden for taking the initiative to organise this meeting. It is an honour to have the opportunity to co-host this event. We would also like to thank Mr. Farhad Jawid and Dr. Evan Atar for their thought-provoking briefing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In his latest report on the protection of civilians, the Secretary General underlined a worrisome trend of indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, that seem to occur with appalling frequency. Too often, the wounded and sick, as well as medical personnel are intentionally attacked.

How then do we ensure a better respect for International Humanitarian Law? And more specifically, how do we better protect healthcare in case of armed conflict?

This question is unfortunately not a new one. But there are solutions for improving the situation.

Between 2012 and 2014 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) held experts’ consultations around the world, with a wide range of organizations and institutions, including States, professional health-care organizations and civil society. As part of this initiative, the Belgian Interministerial Committee on IHL co-organized with ICRC one of the experts’ consultations, focused on the domestic normative framework for the protection of health care.

The aim of the Health Care in Danger initiative was to develop recommendations and measures for making the delivery of health care safer in armed conflict or other emergencies. And today, a trove of information is available online ( <http://healthcareindanger.org>).

**Firstly**, I would like to share with you some of the recommendations related to the development of the domestic legislation:

- *The protection of the emblems is central :*
  - States should adopt specific legislation to reinforce the prestige and significance of the red cross, red crescent, and/or red crystal emblems, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and the Third Additional Protocol of 2005.
  - Specific training programs on the correct use of the emblems should be organized for the armed forces and, where appropriate, for non-State armed groups.
- *Independence and impartiality are universal ethical principles of health care.*
  - States should ensure that domestic laws do not prevent health-care personnel from carrying out their activities according to the ethical duties of their profession.
  - For instance, provisions that incriminate providing health care to certain persons or groups, contravene the principle of impartiality
- *Sanctions serve as an important deterrent to violations of rules protecting the provision of health care.*
  - Sanctions in domestic legislation may be criminal, disciplinary or administrative.
  - State authorities should do everything in their power to enforce existing legal sanctions so that they act as a deterrent.
  - Deliberate attacks against the provision of health care should be sanctioned severely and considered an aggravating factor in the determination of the sanction to be imposed on a perpetrator

**Secondly**, we would also like to highlight the important role that national commissions or committees for the implementation of international humanitarian law play. They advise governments on the development of legislation in this area and help them to design relevant training and policy. The Belgian Interministerial Committee on IHL was set up in 1987 and has since been instrumental for the national application of IHL.

**Lastly**, we are convinced that raising awareness amongst the general public about the serious consequences of attacks against healthcare workers, medical facilities and medical transport can only contribute to a better protection of healthcare in conflict.

Ladies, Gentlemen,

Expressing deep concerns does not suffice. It is up to us, the Member States, to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of healthcare workers and medical infrastructure.

I would like to conclude my remarks by paying special tribute to all individuals, such as Mr. Farhad Jawid and Dr. Evan Atar, who are risking their own lives on a daily basis in order to put an end to the suffering of others.

Thank you, Mr. President.