

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

H.E. Marc PECSTEEN, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the
United Nations

Open VTC at the Security Council on

*“Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Protecting
Civilians affected by Conflict-induced Hunger”*

New York, 21/4/2020

Dear Mr. President,

I would like to thank you for your leadership on the topic of conflict-induced hunger, illustrated by this timely briefing as well as your initiative for a Presidential Statement which we support.

I thank our distinguished briefers for reminding us what this topic is all about: it’s about states not protecting their own civilians; about starving civilians; about warring parties denying humanitarian access, attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure, destroying livelihoods, cattle and agricultural fields, and the disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable, especially on children.

It is about governments impeding humanitarian assistance by imposing less visible administrative impediments and restrictions, and about the difficulties humanitarian organizations experience due to adverse effects of counter-terrorism measures and sanctions.

It is also about the less visible effects from conflict-induced hunger: when a whole generation suffers from malnutrition, the long term consequences compromise the prosperity of the whole society as well as its prospects for sustainable peace.

All 15 members of the SC recognized these challenges, when they adopted unanimously resolution 2417.

Mr. President, you ask how a more comprehensive implementation of this resolution can be achieved. We believe there are many actions the Security Council and member states can undertake to prevent conflicts from causing or aggravating hunger. I will only name a few, inspired of course by resolution 2417:

- States who have influence on parties to conflicts should use this influence in order to incite compliance with IHL. For example, by supporting national investigations and encouraging Member States in the jurisdiction of which violations are committed, to ensure accountability.
- If and when national jurisdictions fail to take action, the Security Council has the tools to trigger a range of international investigation and accountability mechanisms. We welcome in this respect the amendment to the Rome Statute to include as a war crime intentionally starving civilians as a method of warfare also in non-international armed conflicts, and call on member states to adhere to the Rome Statute and to ratify this amendment.

- The Council should also continue to sanction individuals or entities obstructing humanitarian access. Giving appropriate Protection of Civilians' mandates to peace operations, and having them engage in dialogues on access challenges, are other examples.
- Finally, we believe that the Secretary General has an important role to play, in alerting the Security Council when the risk of conflict-induced famine and widespread food insecurity in the context of armed conflict occurs, and in providing us with the necessary information during country specific and briefings on Protection of Civilians.

Lastly, we would like to underline that populations in armed conflicts, weakened by years of violence, destruction, and malnutrition, pushed to their limits by the adverse effects of climate change, are now once again particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. We therefore fully support the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire to ensure adequate response to the pandemic. We also recall that COVID-19 does not exempt governments from their obligations under international, human rights and humanitarian law, and call on all Member States to avoid that COVID-related restrictions would curtail the ability of humanitarian actors to provide assistance.