



**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

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Intervention at

**Security Council Open Debate on**

**“War in cities:**

**protection of civilians in urban settings”**

New York, 25/01/2022

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M. President,

*Belgium aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and with the statement of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict.*

I would like to thank you for organizing this important debate at a critical time for civilians in conflict settings: a time when respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) has dropped to an all-time low and humanitarian needs have increased to an all-time high. The resurgence of urban warfare in the last decades has had a devastating impact on civilian populations, infrastructures and essential services, such as schools and hospitals, with civilians now representing close to 90% of the casualties. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these trends.

Belgium supports a multi-dimensional approach to the protection of civilians that should be based on prevention, protection and assistance activities adapted to the urban context. This approach should also ensure child-protection mainstreaming and pay particular attention to the most vulnerable groups and individuals, such as refugees, children, UASC (Unaccompanied and Separated Children), girls and women, people with disabilities, the elderly, etc.

*(Compliance with IHL)*

First, Belgium calls on all parties to armed conflict to strictly comply with International Humanitarian Law and respect its rules and principles. In particular, strict compliance with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, as well as the prohibition of direct attacks against civilians and civilian objects, is key to ensure the protection of civilians in conflict settings.

*(Protection of essential services and civilian infrastructures)*

Secondly, my delegation calls for the full implementation of the commitments contained in UNSC Resolution 2573 to protect access to essential services. Parties to armed conflict should further integrate concrete measures to safeguard the humanitarian space and protect healthcare and essential civilian facilities, including in counter-terrorism and sanctions contexts. In the planification of military operations, greater attention should also be brought to the possible incidental effects of the conduct of hostilities on civilian infrastructures and services.

*(EWIPA)*

Thirdly, additional measures such as the development of urban-warfare specific policies, the exchange of good practices between armed forces, and the training of military personnel on the demands of the urban environment could further contribute to improving the implementation of IHL and minimizing the humanitarian harm that can arise from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

In this respect, my delegation welcomes the ongoing consultation process led by Ireland aimed at developing a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons.

*(Humanitarian access)*

Fourth, Belgium calls on parties to armed conflict to provide and facilitate rapid and unimpeded access to humanitarian relief and urges all parties to facilitate humanitarian access. My country further calls on donors to provide flexible multi-year funding to humanitarian organizations to ensure longer-term systemic support to civilian populations and to strengthen the resilience of essential service systems so as to reduce the risk of development reversals and reinforce short-term emergency response. The development of partnerships with relevant actors, in particular local communities and essential service providers is also key.

*(Fight against impunity and accountability)*

Fifth, the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes remains one of Belgium's priorities. Belgium continues to support international justice and accountability mechanisms for violations of international law and urges all UN Member States to do the same. In this regard, my country is concerned about reports of a lack of accountability for crimes against children in armed conflicts and calls for the systematic recognition of children as a category of victims in their own right within judicial processes so as to strengthen accountability for violations affecting them.

*(Children and armed conflicts)*

Children are the most vulnerable victims of conflicts and humanitarian disasters. Belgium remains committed to addressing the needs of children affected by armed conflict, facilitating access to education, and intensifying efforts to prevent and address grave violations against them. In this vain, my delegation calls on all parties to particularly address the plight of children and calls for the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Safe School Declaration and the Paris and Vancouver principles.

I thank you Mr. President.