



**Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
to the United Nations**

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Statement

By

H.E. Hon. Keisal M. Peters

Minister of State with the Responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade

At the

**VTC Open Debate on the Protection of civilians in armed conflict:
Indispensable Civilian Objects**

April 27, 2021
New York
United Nations Security Council

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Thank you, Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thanks Vietnam for convening this timely open debate, and further we extend our gratitude to the briefers for their insightful remarks.

The prohibition against the attack, destruction, removal or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population remains a core tenet of international humanitarian law, as enshrined in the Geneva Conventions. Military objectives should never take precedence over the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Far too often both state and non-state actors have violated well-established principles of the law of armed conflict, particularly those of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Sanctions and ill-designed counter-terrorism measures continue to stymie both development and humanitarian access in many locales, bringing untold suffering upon the local population in an attempt to achieve narrow political objectives. To be sure, counterterrorism operations are sometimes necessary to protect people and preserve a country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. However, both sanctions and counterterrorism measures must comply with all principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The socio-economic impact of armed conflict often gives rise to perilous humanitarian crises. When coupled with climate change, severe weather events and environmental degradation these conflicts have a dramatic impact on civilians, *particularly women and children* and extend further, impeding the overall recovery of the countries affected. We have seen the reality of these effects across protracted conflicts on this Council's agenda. In Yemen, the health system is crippled, leaving half of the facilities operational, rendering the country ill-equipped to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. A similar grave situation exists in Syria, where ten years of war have left over 13 million Syrians in need of multidimensional forms of humanitarian assistance, including shelter following mass displacements, and basic healthcare. In conflict-affected areas of Somalia, water and sanitation infrastructure have been destroyed, reducing access to clean water and increasing the risk of preventable diseases, such as cholera. The destruction that occurs as a result of deliberate and indiscriminate attacks hinders efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The destruction of resources needed for civilian life, living and production is causing unbearable suffering for too many people around the world. It is only through staunch compliance with the principles of international law that civilians and civilian infrastructure will be afforded the protection they rightly deserve. We call on all parties to conflict to safeguard water stations, healthcare facilities and other essential infrastructure necessary to reduce vulnerabilities and promote development. The rehabilitation of infrastructure already devastated must also be prioritized to alleviate dire humanitarian situations. In this regard, we continue to encourage the international community to contribute to the restoration of critical infrastructure in countries affected by armed conflict, without which millions will be forced to remain dependent on humanitarian assistance for basic necessities. Reconstruction is also a necessary element which facilitates the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin.

Acts committed in violation of international law must not be tolerated under any circumstances and must be met with condemnation from the international community. The link between justice and peace has long been recognized. As such, we reiterate our call for perpetrators of these abhorrent acts to be held accountable.

Civilians across the globe have suffered as a result of geo-political dynamics over which they have neither influence nor control. We therefore call on parties to conflicts to demonstrate the political will required to achieve lasting peace and stability. This Council has a responsibility to advocate for the victims of armed conflict. We must continue to raise our voices to ensure their protection and to make certain that the international community honours its legal and moral responsibilities to safeguard the survival of people impacted by conflicts around the world.

Thank you.