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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

**Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Mr President,

Let me begin by commending Indonesia for its successful Presidency of the Council and for the focus you have given to this important issue.

The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of states, a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law, and a critical benchmark by which the UN's performance is judged.

Emerging in response to the international community's failures to prevent mass atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s,

the UN's protection of civilians agenda has become a critical component of the Security Council's work to maintain international peace and security.

While a solid normative POC framework has been established, under international law and through Council practice, realities on the ground often paint a different picture.

The majority of casualties in armed conflict are civilians. Vast numbers are killed, maimed, raped, starved or forced to flee. Civilians are often indiscriminately targeted.

Mr President,

Let me make a few points about what more we could do to ensure the protection of civilians.

First, the **Council** must be more systematic, comprehensive and consistent in addressing protection concerns within and across conflict situations.

Where peaceful means are inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations, the Council must uphold the international community's responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities.

We urge all states to sign the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group Code of Conduct and support the France-Mexico initiative on veto restraint, to ensure Council resolutions designed to prevent or halt mass atrocities are not blocked.

Second, the credibility and legitimacy of **UN peacekeeping** depends on the Council's capacity to act when civilians are under threat.

Effective POC requires comprehensive and trusted engagement with local communities to understand and respond to their protection needs.

We welcome the expansion of Community Liaison Alert Networks and recognise the indispensable role of women and child protection advisers in combatting sexual violence and recruitment of child soldiers.

We urge Council members to explore further the unarmed civilian protection methodologies employed by a number of organisations. Community engagement is central to the success of these efforts.

Uniformed components need to be well trained and equipped for POC tasks that require a proactive posture. New POC performance

assessments will help address shortcomings and strengthen accountability.

We encourage all troop-contributing countries to endorse the *Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians*.

Third, we need to enhance and ensure respect for **international humanitarian and human rights law** in conflict.

We welcome the development of national POC policies to ensure international obligations are met and protection strategies are effective. In 2015, we adopted the *Australian Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians*.

We applaud the ongoing engagement with states and non-state armed groups to deepen understanding and respect for international law, including ongoing efforts to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Finally, we support more robust and innovative approaches to accountability, including through sanctions and independent investigative mechanisms, to help bring justice and deter future crimes.

Thank you.