



**Buan-Ionad na hÉireann
chun na Náisiún Aontaithe**
Permanent Mission of Ireland
to the United Nations

UN Security Council Arria-formula Meeting

Protection of Civilians: Achieving a better protection of water-related essential services and infrastructure for the civilian population during armed conflicts.

22 March 2023

Co-chairs,

My thanks first of all to Mozambique and Switzerland for organising this important meeting on the occasion of World Water Day. I also want to thank our briefers for their insightful reflections.

It is alarming to note that one-quarter of humanity, roughly two billion people, live in conflict-affected areas. A record 339 million of them will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2023.

From **Ukraine** to **Yemen** to **Syria**, and from **the Sahel** to **Haiti**, we face the highest number of violent conflicts in the world since 1945. At the heart of this Council's response, what ties all conflicts together, must be an overarching need to protect civilians.

Achieving a better protection of water-related services and infrastructure during armed conflict is essential to this effort. Why? Because in many conflicts, more civilians are killed by disease than by bullets, and because access to safe drinking water and sanitation services are basic human rights that do not end where violence begins.

Yet all too often in conflict, deliberate and indiscriminate attacks destroy infrastructure, injure personnel and cut off the power that keeps water, sanitation and hygiene systems running. When war moves into urban areas, the risk to critical civilian infrastructure increases dramatically.

The deliberate targeting of water facilities has resulted in the destruction of vital infrastructure, creating a water crisis and preventing access to safe water for millions of people. Women, children and other vulnerable groups bear the brunt of these impacts.

In **Ukraine**, water has become both a target and a weapon of Russia's aggression and similar targeting is tragically seen in far too many other instances

But it shouldn't be this way.

International law has long prohibited attacks on, or interference with, objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations.

It is up to *this* Council to insist on the strict application of international humanitarian law in all situations of armed conflict, and to support efforts to hold violators to account.

Co-chairs,

Last year, Ireland was proud to conclude negotiations on a Political Declaration endorsed by 83 State on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which pose a particular risk to critical civilian infrastructure.

We were also pleased to partner with the United States on resolution 2664 establishing a “humanitarian carve-out” to the United Nations sanctions regimes.

While these are important steps forward for the protection of civilians, there is more to do.

Council members should remain seized of the risks to water-related essential services during armed conflict and take decisive action to protect civilians from harm.

It is also time for this Council to recognise the need to integrate climate-related security risk into conflict-prevention strategies. As temperatures rise, water scarcity will continue and may affect international peace and security.

Thank you.