

**FINAL**

**Joint Statement of the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts**

**At the**

**United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians**

**20 May 2026**

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts, a group of states and institutions committed to enhancing the protection of water during armed conflicts through advocacy, good practices, knowledge production, and partnerships in order to protect civilians and the environment.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the Presidency of the Security Council, China, for convening today's Open Debate on the protection of civilians.

Excellencies, Colleagues, we are honoured to address the Council at the **fifth Anniversary of the UN Security Council resolution 2573 (2021)**, a landmark resolution reaffirming the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and of civilian infrastructure essential to the provision of basic services. A year ago, the Global Alliance delivered its first joint statement before this Council, expressing profound concern about the grim state of the protection of civilians around the world. Regrettably, those concerns have only deepened.

Since then, the international community has witnessed another year marked by escalating armed conflicts, deepening instability, and devastating civilian harm. Across active armed conflicts in which destruction of, damage to, and disruption of services essential to civilian survival — including access to safe drinking water and sanitation — impacted a record number of civilians. As underscored in this year's Secretary-General's report, attacks against water and sanitation infrastructure continue to render these facilities inoperable, with devastating consequences for civilian populations and the delivery of essential services.

Through these attacks we have witnessed blatant disrespect of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, while multilateral institutions are weakening, and humanitarian financing contracting

Against this backdrop the Global Alliance is united in conveying the following messages:

- **Water, as a lifeline for civilians in armed conflicts, must be protected.**
- The collapse of vital services, including freshwater supply, water infrastructure, sanitation, healthcare and electricity, constitutes a humanitarian disaster for civilians in

conflict-affected areas and increasingly regions. Beyond immediate harm, disruption of essential services creates reverberating effects that heighten displacement, disease, food insecurity, and result in other protection risks for civilians.

- We are particularly concerned by the growing number of deliberate attacks against freshwater supplies, drinking water installations and water infrastructure indispensable to civilian survival.
- We reaffirm that the deliberate use of water as a weapon of war considered as flagrant violation of the International Humanitarian Law.
- We condemn all attacks against humanitarian personnel and essential service providers. Their work on repairing, maintaining and monitoring the operation of water systems and other critical civilian infrastructure in both urban and rural settings are indispensable to the survival, dignity and resilience of affected populations.

The convergence and acceleration of armed conflicts have placed millions of civilians, including children, women, persons with disabilities and older persons, at risk of losing access to basic means of survival, including water and sanitation, with severe consequences for health, dignity, and livelihoods and human security.

The Alliance therefore proposes the following priorities for action:

Firstly, respect for international law must be upheld. One of the main goals of our Alliance is to proactively invoke IHL obligations to frame protection of freshwater resources and water infrastructure as a legal imperative, not merely an operational aspiration. As stipulated under international humanitarian law, parties to conflict must not attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. We respectfully but urgently request members of the Security Council and other Member States with influence over parties to conflicts to use their influence to ensure adherence to rules designed to respect water systems and other essential services.

Secondly, WASH services must be prioritized within humanitarian response and recovery efforts. Within the shrinking humanitarian and development finance, the WASH sector has been among the hardest hit. WASH systems are particularly vulnerable to unpredictable financing cycles as they depend on continuous operational support. With unsafe water already claiming more lives than bullets, we must reverse this trend, as well as empower local WASH actors and service providers. They are often decisive to provide immediate, effective and sustainable services.

These appeals do not constitute new commitments. Rather, they represent a call for the full and consistent implementation of obligations and commitments already undertaken by this Council and by Member States to protect civilians and the systems they depend on for survival.

**UN Security Council resolution 2573 (2021)** emphasized with deep concern the devastating impact of armed conflicts on access to essential services, including water and sanitation.

**UN Security Council resolution 2417 (2018)** called on all parties to armed conflict to spare civilian objects, including water systems, and refrain from attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.

**UN Security Council resolution 2730 (2024)** called upon all States to respect and protect humanitarian personnel as well as United Nations and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited staff.

The Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflicts stands ready to support the Security Council, Member States and partners across the multilateral system in advancing the effective implementation of existing commitments aimed at protecting civilians and the essential services upon which they depend on during armed conflict. At the time of growing civilian suffering and mounting pressure on the international protection architecture, safeguarding water and other services indispensable to civilian survival must remain a collective priority and shared responsibility.

I thank you.