



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

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**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia
Nataša Pirc Musar
at the opening of the international conference
“Strengthening the Protection of Civilians:
The Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts”**

Ljubljana, 11 June 2024

*Distinguished Former President Dr Danilo Türk,
Distinguished Minister Marjan Šarec,
Distinguished Ambassadors and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Today, 75 years after the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions, the number of wars around the world and the civilian victims thereof is skyrocketing. We are facing the largest number of armed conflicts since the Second World War.

I find this fact simply devastating and inexcusable for our modern civilisation.

While we know that most conflicts today wreak havoc inside countries, inter-state conflicts have not disappeared. Indeed, they have taken an unexpected turn for the worse: they are a direct threat to the international order, with the United Nations as its pillar.

In the ongoing aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, Russian attacks against critical civilian infrastructure are in clear violation of international humanitarian law. We listen to the news about the rising numbers of internally displaced persons and the worsening of the situation of the most vulnerable: children and the elderly.

In Gaza, all the people share one simple dream at sunset – to wake up the next day. No place is safe for the civilians in Rafah and the rest of Gaza. International humanitarian law and human rights law are blatantly disrespected, including a dire lack of humanitarian access.

While Gaza and Ukraine remain under the media spotlight, most other conflicts take place far from our eyes and our attention. Take, for example, the humanitarian situation in Yemen. While some improvements have been seen in the past couple of years, horrifying food insecurity and malnutrition continue to be reported there, with women and children being especially threatened. All parties to the conflict have committed violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. They continue to do so with impunity.

Or, think of Sudan. With thousands of civilians killed, millions displaced, looting and the destruction of essential infrastructure, a catastrophic humanitarian crisis has emerged. Particularly alarming are renewed ethnically targeted attacks in Darfur and the widespread use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. It may well be another genocide is occurring there while we are – to borrow the term, sleepwalking.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this has to stop. This should be our minimal moral imperative. The perpetrators who feast on other people's lives have to be brought to justice. The questions at hand are how we could use international humanitarian and human rights law to assist in the advocacy of peace and humanity. How to provide better protection for civilians in contemporary complex and recurring armed conflicts? How to end impunity for aggression, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity? And how can we secure full respect for the international humanitarian law in urban areas or in cyber-space to avoid devastating numbers of civilian casualties?

For Slovenia, as a current non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, these questions are of utter importance. I am pleased to see that our diplomats in New York, Geneva and elsewhere are working tirelessly to address these sad stories of our contemporary life. In this regard, let me share the main impression I have from my international travels. Since I started my mandate, I have observed that the role of Slovenia, as a defender of international law, and especially humanitarian and human rights law, is a constructive and respected one. So, not only am I a proud Slovenian, but I am a proud Slovenian for a very good reason.

I wish you fruitful and successful discussions in the next two days and I am looking forward to the much needed conclusions and recommendations this conference will offer all of us.

Thank you.