

Human Rights Council – 27th session

Panel discussion on ensuring use of remotely piloted aircraft or armed drones in counter-terrorism and military operations in accordance with international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law

Statement by Ireland

22 September 2014

Mr. President,

Ireland welcomes today's discussion. While armed drones as such are not illegal, there is a need to address and investigate possible disproportionate civilian casualties caused by their use. Ireland has consistently taken the view that the use of drones must be in accordance with international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law.

Though drone technology continues to advance, and the use of drones proliferates, we recall the EU position that the established international law framework constitutes an adequate framework for the use of remotely piloted aircraft. We welcome the work done, including by both of the distinguished Special Rapporteurs, to ensure that due consideration is given to issues arising from their use. There is indeed a need to establish clear international consensus on a number of legal questions. The limitations imposed by international law on the use of lethal force must not be weakened by relaxing interpretations of international legal standards.

States must take responsibility for their actions. They must make every effort to avoid civilian casualties, and must take steps to address and investigate harm caused to civilians. States must facilitate prompt, independent and impartial investigations where civilian deaths or injuries are reported. In cases where drone strikes are proven to have been unlawful, access to an effective remedy must be provided.

Ireland commends efforts made to date to quantify the use of armed drones, and urges States to be as transparent as possible concerning their use. The release by States of information concerning the extent of use of armed drones, and the numbers and identities of casualties, would constitute a significant step forward in promoting greater accountability.

We would be grateful if the experts could outline further potential best practices on declassifying data, particularly in relation to civilian casualties and the use of drones.