



Federal Republic of Germany
Foreign Office

PROTECTING CIVILIANS IN URBAN WARFARE

TOWARDS A POLITICAL DECLARATION TO ADDRESS THE HUMANITARIAN HARM ARISING FROM THE USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

Geneva Consultations

18 November 2019,
Room VII, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Statement by Ambassador Peter A. Beerwerth,

Permanent Representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament

Mr. Chair,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The subject of protecting civilians from the effects of explosive weapons in urban contexts is particularly important to Germany and it is therefore gratifying to see, how interest and commitment in this important issue have increased over the last months.

We would like to thank Austria and Ireland for their initiative to prepare a political declaration and are grateful to Ireland for chairing today's meeting.

Germany is gravely concerned at the humanitarian harm being caused during active hostilities, often due to a lack of compliance with, or ineffective implementation of IHL when it comes to the use of explosive weapons in urban contexts. The

international community needs to act to achieve changes in conduct for a more effective implementation of IHL and a significantly improved protection of civilians.

Germany is pleased that at the Vienna conference on “Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare”, the vast majority of the 133 participating States signaled their support for a political declaration that focuses on improving the protection of civilians through strict compliance with IHL. We welcome that Germany’s operational approach has found wide acceptance. It aims at strengthening compliance with existing rules of international humanitarian law through the development and sharing of military good practices. We are confident that this approach will make it possible to achieve concrete improvements in the protection of the civilian population.

For the effective implementation of IHL principles – humanity, distinction, necessity and proportionality – adequate capabilities are needed. This demands a holistic approach. It needs to encompass heightened awareness and appropriate reflection in military doctrines, strategic directives, tactical instructions, rules of engagement, education, training and exercises of armed forces as well as testing and documentation of new weapons, means and methods of warfare before fielding. We should share good practices and strengthen cooperation and assistance. That can provide new avenues to better address the needs and specific circumstances of States.

Germany is willing to support a political declaration that has the potential to instigate changes of conduct leading to enhanced compliance with IHL and to an enhanced effectiveness of mitigating harm of civilians when operating in urbanized conflict environments. Germany would thus advocate for a political declaration that highlights the importance of compliance with IHL, spells out the relevant principles and that promotes the development and sharing of good military practices. In addition, Germany would see merit in a declaration that proposes concrete measures

and mechanisms for enhancing and spreading the exchange of good practices. These measures should also include the strengthening of data collection and appropriate training capacities to disseminate the good practices agreed upon in the political declaration, as well as adequate mechanisms to fund the above mentioned activities.

For further details on the German position concerning a political declaration and Germany's views on the protection of civilians in urban conflicts, we refer to the German working papers submitted at the CCW in 2018 and 2019 as well as to the British, French and German working paper "Key Principles for a Political Declaration on EWIPA". Germany also endorses the US working paper "practical measures to strengthen the protection of civilians during military operations in armed conflict".

Thank you.