

- First of all, we would like to thank Ireland for organising today's informal consultations. We would also like to thank Austria for the conference held in Vienna in early October on protecting civilians in urban warfare.
- Civilian harm *from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas* has increased significantly in recent years. More conflicts take place in urban settings, and asymmetrical warfare against non-state actors holding civilians hostage has become a challenge which must be addressed. Norway is deeply concerned about the protection implications of this development.
- The Secretary General's latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict presents a powerful message that the *patterns of harm include not only the immediate threat to civilian lives, but also the longer-term impact on critical infrastructure* – which in turn may lead to displacement and exacerbate critical humanitarian situations.
- We welcome the initiative by Austria and Ireland to launch informal consultations on a political declaration. We consider that a political declaration can create a platform for dialogue and be a tool to increase compliance with IHL obligations.
- We are not looking to create new legal obligations or make amendments to existing IHL, but rather to agree on practical guidelines to ensure greater awareness of the challenges involved in targeting and protection considerations in hot conflict and thereby increase adherence to key principles of IHL, including distinction, precaution, necessity and proportionality.
- We welcome the various papers which have been circulated and which contribute to a clearer picture of which key principles are considered to be a useful point of departure for these consultations.
- The joint statement on protection of civilians against explosive weapons recently delivered by Ireland in the UN First Committee was co-sponsored by a considerably higher number of states than last year. This demonstrates the potential for reaching a wider audience on this issue. We consider that this joint statement provides a starting point for agreed language in a future political declaration.
- Moving ahead, it is essential that we work in partnership, that we share and build on good practice and experience to develop practical measures and tools. The lessons learned of states should be brought forward to guide our work. In addition, we should cooperate closely with and build on evidence gathered by humanitarian organisations, including both the UN, the ICRC and civil society, in pursuit of our common goal of minimising humanitarian harm.

- We look forward to contributing to the development of a political declaration with the aim to increase protection of civilians in urban warfare.
- Thank you.