



**Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States
Ms. Simona Popan, Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to the
United Nations**

at the Sixth Committee

on the Agenda item 81:

**" Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and
relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts "**

United Nations

New York

17 October 2022

– CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –

Thank you, Mr./Madam Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries North Macedonia*, Montenegro* and the Republic of Moldova, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EFTA country Liechtenstein, as well as Georgia and San Marino align themselves with this statement.

Mr./Madam Chair,

‘Even war has rules’, as it has often been said.

On August 12, 1949 - after the horrors of two world wars - the Four Geneva Conventions were signed to establish rules for wars. The Four Geneva Conventions are universally ratified. But the two additional Protocols adopted in 1977 to formulate more robust protection for victims of international and non-international armed conflicts, are not yet universally ratified.

We welcome that 174 States are party to Additional Protocol I and 169 States to Additional Protocol II, which still places the Additional Protocols amongst the world's most widely ratified legal instruments. We call on all remaining States that value our shared humanity to ratify the Protocols. We also stress that most rules contained in the 1977 Additional Protocols have gained the status of customary international law.

Mr./Madam Chair,

The EU is deeply concerned by the pervasiveness of armed conflicts across the globe, which cause immense suffering to millions of civilians. The latest example is Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, which has brought dramatic consequences for the civilian population, including civilian death, the destruction of vital infrastructure, and massive displacement.

It is with deep sadness that we observe, as reported by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that civilians account for nearly 90 per cent of casualties when explosive weapons are used indiscriminately in populated areas.¹ We reiterate that civilian population

* *North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*

¹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>

and individual civilians enjoy general protection against the dangers posed by acts of war, and that, in case of doubt, a person must be considered as a civilian.

Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict must also be considered as civilians (in accordance with Article 79 of Additional Protocol I). Security Council resolution 2222 (2015), adopted by unanimity, recalls the same, notably that journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel are considered as civilians and must be respected and protected as such, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians. Equally, media equipment and installations constitute civilian objects and must not be the object of attack or of reprisals, unless they are military objectives. With continuous attacks on journalists in armed conflicts worldwide, we urge Member States to protect media workers from harm during armed conflict.

The EU also notes with deep concern that the number of attacks against health facilities and medical personnel continue to increase, including in Ukraine, where the World Health Organization documented over 470 attacks as of end August 2022. Protecting healthcare – including for mental health – in armed conflict remains a priority for the EU. The EU is committed to supporting the collection and analysis of data on attacks against medical personnel and health facilities. The EU is also committed to supporting concrete measures to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers. In addition, protecting cultural property from the effects of armed conflict remains also a priority for the EU.

Mr./Madam Chair,

We believe training and education on IHL should be a centrepiece of our efforts to increase adherence to IHL during armed conflict. According to the ICRC, with whom we work in close partnership, the respect for IHL is a joint responsibility of all States, and training of military and officials on IHL is crucial in increasing compliance. We also believe, as expressed by the ICRC, that the training of armed forces in peacetime, the appointment of legal advisers to the armed forces, and the teaching and dissemination of IHL to officials and the general population at large are important steps to assuring respect for IHL. We commend the important work that has been done in this area by States, civil society and other organisations, with the ICRC and the national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies at the forefront of educational initiatives.

The European Union implements training of IHL into the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The CSDP integrates IHL into all non-executive military missions in their mandates. The missions are guided by and actively promote compliance with IHL. The IHL

training modules offered by the EU Training Missions in Mali, Central African Republic, Somalia and Mozambique to the national armed forces showcase the importance and relevance of the EU's integrated approach. We build on the close coordination and support of our international partners. The EU has adopted Guidelines setting out operational tools for the EU and its institutions and bodies to promote compliance with IHL, and reports annually on the implementation of these Guidelines. The last report was issued in June this year.

Mr./Madam Chair,

Armed conflict breeds endless human suffering. But 'even wars have limits', as said by ICRC.

In a world where regrettably wars continue to be waged, we must never stop working toward the reduction of suffering of all that is to be protected: life, dignity, civilian, medical, educational and cultural property and our environment. To this end, the EU and its Member States reiterate their commitment to upholding international humanitarian law, as part of a wider commitment laid down in the EU founding Treaties to advance respect for human dignity and for the principles of international law.

I thank you.