

Statement of Portugal

at the 77th Session of Sixth Committee of the General Assembly

Agenda Item 81

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

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Mr. Chairman,

Portugal aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union on this agenda item and would like to convey the following remarks in its national capacity.

As we celebrate the 45th anniversary of their adoption, the 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 remain fundamental cornerstones in the codification of the protection of victims of international and non-international armed conflicts.

Portugal has ratified both and has been a long supporter of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission established under Article 90 of Additional Protocol I, whose competence my country accepted in 1994. Last year, and for the first time, a Portuguese national was elected to this Commission, whose members serve in their personal capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his report on the status of the 1977 Additional Protocols, as requested in Paragraph 11 of Resolution 75/138, adopted by the General Assembly on 15 December 2020.

Pursuant to Paragraph 12 of the same Resolution, Portugal has transmitted information to the Secretary-General, focusing on new developments and activities on the status of the Additional Protocols during the reporting period.

My delegation wishes to convey its appreciation for all other contributions submitted to the Secretary-General by Member States and by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has reported several accessions and ratifications, between June 2020 and April 2022, to the Additional Protocols and other pertinent international legally binding instruments.

This shows that, in addition to abiding by customary international humanitarian law, States are also consenting to becoming bound to treaties on various topics with relevance to armed conflict, including international criminal justice, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control.

Mr. Chairman,

Regrettably, achieving effective implementation of the Additional Protocols remains problematic, due to both old and new challenges for the protection of victims of armed conflict – from State capacity to adequately train and supervise its armed forces on these matters, to new means and methods of warfare and new actors in armed conflict.

In this context, domestic measures play a paramount role. Portuguese authorities have implemented several such measures, such as maintaining a close and fruitful collaboration with the Portuguese Red Cross.

Furthermore, and as reported to the Secretary-General, Portugal has created a National Committee on International Humanitarian Law, in December 2021. In doing so, we have fulfilled a specific pledge made by Portugal and the Portuguese Red Cross at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

This national committee has a broad mandate and will certainly prove a very useful mechanism for Portugal to disseminate and implement relevant international legal obligations relating to the protection of victims of armed conflict.

Portugal looks forward to engaging with other Member States, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other relevant humanitarian stakeholders, in enhancing international and regional cooperation on these matters.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation's closing words are of tribute to the victims of armed conflict, as well as to all professional and volunteer humanitarians, whose work embodies the Fundamental Principles of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, and Universality.

As we speak, millions are directly and indirectly affected by armed conflicts. The scourge of a full-fledged war has returned to Europe, reminding the world that no region is eternally immune to armed conflict.

The international legal framework relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts remains one of the most important instruments in preserving and defending human lives and human dignity.

Portugal thus urges all parties to armed conflicts to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including for the 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.