

 Permanent Mission  
of Austria to the  
United Nations in New York

**79<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly  
Sixth Committee**

**Agenda item 81: Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva  
Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed  
conflicts**

**Statement by Mr. Maximilian Gorke  
Legal Adviser**

**Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations**

**New York, 4 November 2024**

Thank you, Mr./Madam Chair,

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union and we would like to make the following remarks in our national capacity.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report.

This year marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions. They embody the not at all novel idea that warfare must have limits and human dignity must be respected. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 have been universally ratified and, together with their three additional protocols, form the cornerstone of contemporary international humanitarian law. In this regard, it is worthwhile noting Art. 1, common to all four Geneva Conventions of 1949, namely that the High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and ensure respect for the Conventions in all circumstances. Therefore, effective implementation and compliance with international humanitarian law should be a joint endeavour of the international community. Yet, we are reminded every day of the terrible consequences of that not being the case. More must be done to improve implementation of and compliance with IHL.

Protection of civilians in armed conflicts remains one of the most important priorities of our foreign policy. Austria has been working towards a better implementation of international humanitarian law for many years. Austria works closely with the Austrian Red Cross and other relevant stakeholders at national level in order to promote observance and dissemination of IHL standards. In 2023, we organised the European regional conference of National Committees on International Humanitarian Law together with the Austrian Red Cross and ICRC in Vienna. This conference served as a forum for the exchange of best practices and discussions on topical issues such as use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Following the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA Political Declaration), Austria organised a Military Workshop in January 2024 in Vienna on the Implementation of said declaration. It was aimed at enhancing the practical understanding between the political and military levels of military operations concerning the reduction of civilian harm. On a national level, the Austrian Armed Forces are in the process of systematically integrating the commitments made in the EWIPA Political Declaration into its strategy, training and procurement.

Earlier this year, Austria hosted the international conference “Humanity at the Crossroads: Autonomous Weapons Systems and the Challenge of Regulation” in Vienna. Its objective was to further advance the discourse around the challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems and the urgent need for negotiating a dedicated legally-binding instrument to address these challenges. Also this year, Austria finalized its position paper on cyber activities and international law. It is our understanding that IHL applies to all cyber activities in connection with an armed conflict. In this regard, the cyber activity must be undertaken by one party to the conflict against the other party and must contribute to the former party’s military effort.

To conclude, I would like to stress Austria’s continued strong commitment to IHL and to the adherence of the Geneva Conventions including their additional protocols. We stand ready to work together with partners to improve compliance with IHL and strive for the protection of people affected by armed conflict.

Thank you!