

**First international follow-up conference to the adoption of the
Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the
Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in
Populated Areas**

23th April 2024, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m

Thematic session I: Military policies and practices

Secretary General of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence

Dr. Arnold KAMMEL

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

I would like to thank our Norwegian hosts for their leadership and hospitality. Armed conflicts of today are predominantly taking place in urban environments, in Ukraine, in Gaza or Yemen, show patterns of massive civilian harm and the urgent need to do more for the protection of civilians in compliance with IHL. The EWIPA Political Declaration is a landmark instrument in this regard and today's Conference is of utmost importance to steer its effective implementation and its universalisation

As I am standing here in front of you as the Secretary General of the Austrian Ministry of Defence – as well as the speech we have just heard from Rear Admiral Marthinsen – gives testimony to the fact how important it is for the military to be actively engaged in the implementation process of the EWIPA Declaration. Ministries of Defence and Armed Forces have a special role to play because many provisions of the Declaration fall under their responsibility. Taking this understanding as our starting point, the Austrian MoD and MFA in January this year organised the “Vienna Military Workshop on EWIPA”. It brought together more than 90 experts from the military of 41 countries, UN, international and regional organisations and civil society to exchange and to foster the discussions on how to translate the provisions of the Declaration into concrete actions. By organising the Workshop, Austria continued its long-standing efforts in the field of Protection of Civilians.

The results of the Workshop were compiled by the organisers in an Outcome Document, which is available as a working paper on the conference website.

Let me highlight some of the findings of the Workshop that may provide input for the upcoming exchange, especially on “military policies and practices”, and next implementation steps of the Declaration:

- As armed conflicts will always take a heavy toll on civilians, the first step in every effort to protect civilians must therefore be to avoid conflicts at all costs.

- As the prevalence of urban warfare is increasing, militaries must prepare for the specific challenges especially concerning the use of EWIPA. Avoiding civilian harm in accordance with the Declaration should be seen as a legal, ethical and strategic priority for mission success and translated from the higher echelons down to the tactical level.
- Additionally, it must be kept in mind that different scenarios entail different challenges in this regard. Particularly in high-intensity conflicts, much more thought needs to be given on how the protection of the civilian population can be ensured.
- A concrete first step could be for militaries to review already existing policies and practices on protecting civilians with a view to fully integrate EWIPA and identify possible gaps or needs for adjustments in this regard. Austria has already started such a review-process.
- Recognising the need to protect civilians in accordance with the Declaration, may have far-reaching consequences on the structure and role of some military branches. As a case in point, there might be a requirement of the artillery to focus more on precision and confined weapon effects than on effecting large areas. Another point raised was the need to more actively include civilian expertise in military planning and training.
- In general, the knowledge of the technical characteristics of explosive munition and their delivery systems as well as effects they have in a specific context of use including potential direct or reverberating effects must be enhanced to take into account the humanitarian consequences the use of a weapon can have.
- When planning scenarios for military exercises, efforts should be made to integrate the challenges of protecting the civilian population from the use of EWIPA, like the civilian presence, the built-up structure or the interconnectedness of services. An adequate level of information about the civilian environment is a decisive factor here.
- The last point I want to raise is the importance of leadership. The Commander's intent during military operations and its transmission to the soldiers in the field is one of the most important aspect to ensure the protection of civilians from the humanitarian consequences of the use of EWIPA.

Distinguished participants,

This is just a brief outline of the very rich and fruitful discussions we had in Vienna. I would therefore highly encourage you to have a closer look at the Outcome Document.

From our perspective, the fruitful exchange at the Vienna Military Workshop clearly underlined the importance of military-to-military exchanges for the implementation process of the Declaration in the future.

Let me conclude by ensuring you that Austria will stay committed to work together for an effective implementation of the Declaration to make a difference on the ground for the protection of civilians.

I thank you!