

**Second international conference of the
Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the
Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in
Populated Areas**

19th November 2025, 10:15 - 13:00

Session 1: General Debate

Secretary General of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence

Dr. Arnold KAMMEL

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

I would like to sincerely thank our Costa Rican hosts for welcoming us in their beautiful capital San José and their international leadership in organising the second follow-up conference of the EWIPA Declaration. We also thank Ireland and Norway for their efforts in the troika. Let me also pay tribute to UNODA for the excellent technical support provided to States. I thank [name of survivor] for his/her powerful statement that explains why and how the EWIPA Declaration can and must make a difference on the ground. Austria is pleased to particularly support the participation of survivors in this Conference.

Looking back at the road since Oslo, when I last delivered a statement, the urgency of the problem, which lead to the adoption of this landmark instrument, has undiminished relevance: when explosive weapons are used in conflicts, it is primarily civilians who suffer from their harmful immediate and long term effects including reverberating effects. We witness this sobering fact in Gaza, Ukraine, Lebanon, Sudan, Myanmar and many other conflict settings around the world, resulting in an estimated number of nearly 60.000 civilians killed or injured in 2024. The call to us to increase our efforts and address this grave humanitarian problem can not be clearer.

Yet, since last year, positive steps have been taken as well. The number of Endorsing States has grown to 88, underlining the significance of the Declaration. It is a clear sign of the willingness to strengthen International Humanitarian Law and reduce civilian suffering. In addition, many States have started or intensified the implementation of the Declaration. Austria facilitated this process by organising the “Vienna Military Workshop on EWIPA” last year. It brought together more than 90 experts from 41 States, international and regional organisations as well as civil society to exchange and to foster discussions on how to translate the provisions of the Declaration into concrete actions. The results of the Workshop were compiled in an Outcome Document, which can be found online.

Given the enormous positive feedback that we received for this initiative, Austria will organise a second Workshop next year in Geneva in cooperation with UNODA, focusing on specific issues that have proven to be of particular relevance for States in the military domain. You will receive the relevant information on the Workshop in due course.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The best normative framework can not ensure the protection of civilians by itself if its principles and requirements are deliberately disregarded. I therefore call upon all States to fully comply with international law in all circumstances.

Let me share a few key aspects on how Austria has been implementing the Declaration.

2022 marked not only the national endorsement of the Declaration, but also saw the greatest changes in Austria's security and defence policy since the end of the Cold War. The political decision was made to revitalise national defence and strengthen the Austrian Armed Forces. Against this backdrop of strategic changes in Austria's defence policy in general and the Austrian Armed Forces in particular, the implementation process is currently taking place.

Let me point out three specific structural, procedural and training measures:

1. Firstly, we are particularly proud to announce the establishment of a Centre of Excellence on Protection of Civilians inside our Centre for International Stabilisation Measures, Verification and Arms Control. This unit will function as a hub for best practices in the field of Protection of Civilians and contribute to international capacity building. Together with the Human Security Section, the CoE will strengthen our institutional capacities to better protect civilians, including from the effects of explosive weapons.
2. Secondly, the Ministry of Defence started the restructuring of its Article-36-weapon-review-process last year. The aim is to ensure a more structured incorporation of our international commitments in the military procurement process. We consider a strengthened weapon review process as an important implementation step of the Declaration.
3. Thirdly, Austria has been organising a Comprehensive Protection of Civilians Course under the umbrella of the European Security and Defence College since 2012 to provide international training. With the aim to reflect new developments in this field, among those the prevalence of urban warfare and the adoption of the EWIPA-Declaration, we critically examined evolving conflict dynamics and their impact on Protection of Civilians. In May this year, a multi-stakeholder Workshop was convened in Vienna. It included representatives from various States, international organisations, the ICRC and civil society, to collect input on this subject. We are now proud to announce the amended version of the PoC-Course, which will take place in Brussels in February 2026. Two additional courses will be organized in Austria in the course of 2026.

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

In closing, let me assure you that Austria, the Austrian Ministry of Defence and the Austrian Armed Forces will continue their efforts to prevent and mitigate civilian harm that can arise from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

I thank you!