



First international follow-up conference to the adoption of the Political Declaration on EWIPA

Statement of Belgium (session 1 – military policies and practices)

Oslo 23 April 2024

Allow me to first warmly thank our Norwegian hosts for organizing this important follow up conference in Oslo.

Responding to your questions regarding national policies, let me highlight some national practices to protect civilians in armed conflict. Belgian Defence is committed to the thorough and rigorous application of international law, particularly international humanitarian law. It consistently seeks ways to optimize the application of force to minimize the risk of collateral damage. Everything starts with base training in international humanitarian law. Before every operational deployment, the armed forces are briefed about the legal framework and the applicable rules of engagement.

During the operation, standard operational procedures apply for selecting targets, whereby an evaluation of collateral damage risks is undertaken and the choice is made for the most appropriate means to achieve the desired operational result. Before any strike the Belgian defense forces have to verify the nature of the target and evaluate the collateral damage risks using the standard NATO collateral damage estimation methodology. If no positive identification of the target is possible or if there is a risk of disproportionate civilian damages, the

strike is cancelled. Moreover, there is an obligation to strictly respect the rules of engagement that define the circumstances and means to use force and the level of authority needed to authorize use of force. For engaging certain types of targets and/or using certain types of arms/ammunition, a higher level of authority may be required.

In each operation, the permanent presence of a legal advisor is guaranteed in order to assist and advise the commanding officer, including during the targeting process.

The members of the Belgian armed forces are compelled to report any incident, including possible violation of international humanitarian law.

These operational procedures can be strengthened through technical assets. In this respect, the acquisition of the MQ-9 SkyGuardian drones with enhanced Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities will contribute to more precise identification of potential targets. Furthermore, the planned acquisition of the Caesar artillery system will enable the future use of precision-guided munitions.

Finally, let me assure you of Belgium's support for continued outreach and awareness-building. During the European Humanitarian Forum in Brussels, last month, Belgium together with Norway, Ireland and civil society, organized a session on explosive weapons in populated areas.