

## **Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas**

Session 1: Military policies and practices, 23.4.2024

### **Finland's statement**

Mr/Mrs Chair,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share some of Finland's national perspectives on the implementation of EWIPA Declarations commitments.

In 2022, Finland was very pleased to endorse the EWIPA Declaration in Dublin, as it signalled light in the extremely challenging times for the multilateral rules-based order as a whole, and more specifically for the conventional arms control regimes. The Declaration reaffirmed our obligations under international law, including International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, and highlighted our shared obligations to hold accountable those responsible for violations of international law.

Finland is committed to the full and effective implementation of international law and IHL, and EWIPA. In practice this means that the Finnish Defence Forces have a comprehensive approach in their practices to avoid and minimize civilian harm, whilst maintaining preparedness to defend all of Finland's territory against an aggressor. The first and most crucial step in mitigating civilian harm during an armed conflict is an effective public warning system and proactive evacuation of populated areas, in which efficient co-operation with the competent civilian authorities is the key. Finland's concept for comprehensive security is a crucial foundation in our whole of government approach to preparedness planning, which also contributes to mitigating civilian harm during conflict.

Another important step is taking the necessary precautions during the planning of military operations. The use of the Defence Forces' long range weapon systems is based on a targeting process, which determines the targets critical to the aggressor's activities and to the desired impact. The possible collateral damage and its humanitarian, diplomatic, political, infrastructural and moral impacts are assessed as part of the targeting process, and impact the restrictions of the selected targets.

There is also a comprehensive set of safety criteria and regulations aimed towards mitigating incidental harm to civilians or civilian infrastructure. For example, certain safety distances are set for firing units in relation to prohibited areas for artillery shelling. After the end of hostilities, explosives are collected in separate storage sites aimed at minimising the risks to civil society and the environment. During and after the hostilities the civilian population will be actively informed of dangerous areas and, if necessary, restrictions on movement are imposed, including markings and prohibition signs.

The EWIPA-declaration emphasises the importance of training of military personnel on the application of IHL. In the Finnish Defence Forces, training in the rules of war is part of the training of conscripts and the active personnel's degree programme. In addition, The Finnish Red cross, in

cooperation with the Defence Forces, organises basic and specialised courses on humanitarian law, including the effects of explosive weapons on the living and natural environment.

To conclude, though Finland has already taken extensive steps to implement the elements of the declaration, there is still need for reviewing and improving military policies and practices to protect civilians in conflict situations when necessary. A comparison and exchange on existing practices is useful to further improve national practices and allow for a better adaptation to changing contexts, adversaries as well as new technological developments.

We thank the panelists for their thought-provoking presentations and look forward to frank and engaging exchanges with our colleagues.

Thank you.