

Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

It is my privilege to welcome you to today's keynote address, where we gather to explore one of the most pressing and complex issues: the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The panel will focus on the commitments in the Declaration pertaining to the adoption, review and implementation of policies and practices by states aimed at strengthening the protection of civilians and avoiding civilian harm, from a military perspective.

In the landscape of modern warfare, the proliferation of explosive weapons has fundamentally altered the nature of armed conflict. No longer confined to remote battlefields or distant frontlines, the impact of these weapons now reaches into the heart of our communities, threatening the lives and livelihoods of civilians caught in the crossfire.

Today, we confront a sobering reality: the widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas exacts a staggering toll on human lives, inflicting untold suffering and devastation on civilians. To strengthen the protection of civilians there are initiatives like EWIPA, a collective resolve of nations, organisations, and individuals committed to upholding the principles of humanity and protecting the most vulnerable among us. It is this spirit of solidarity and determination that compels us to come together today, to confront the challenges before us and chart a path to lower the effects of warfare on civilian populations.

Addressing the topic of explosive weapons in populated areas is crucial, as it intersects with the safety, security, and well-being of countless individuals worldwide. Such weapons pose significant risks not only to human lives but also to the infrastructure, environment, and social fabric of communities. Today, we will delve into the complexities encompassing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, examining the humanitarian, ethical, and strategic considerations involved. Our aim is to foster understanding and dialogue on this critical issue, with a focus on promoting measures that minimise harm and protect civilian populations.

The declaration encourages cooperation between states, and in particular cooperation between armed forces, on the development of policies and guidelines, and with training material and repetitive rehearsals. We welcome and look forward to discussions on how we can improve our efforts in this regard.

When discussing the military implementation of explosive weapons in populated areas, it's important to consider several key aspects, Tactical Considerations, Rules of Engagement, Precision and Collateral Damage, Humanitarian Concerns, and Legal and Ethical Considerations. It requires a multifaceted approach that balances operational imperatives with humanitarian considerations. Striking this balance is essential to mitigate harm to civilians and uphold the principles of international law and ethics in armed conflicts.

An important aspect of a military approach is for the Norwegian armed forces the Article 36 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions. The Article establishes a critical framework for the review of new weapons, means, and methods of warfare to ensure compliance with International Humanitarian Law principles. The obligation encompasses both conventional weapons and emerging technologies, such as autonomous weapon systems and cyber warfare capabilities. It requires consultation and collaboration with various stakeholders throughout the review process and governed by a systematic and interdisciplinary approach. By considering legal, technical, and humanitarian factors, states can make informed decisions to minimise the humanitarian impact of armed conflict. The Norwegian Defence Sector and the Armed Forces have implemented mechanisms that ensures such reviews.

A second key aspect for us is a manual providing guidance on International Humanitarian Law. It serves several important purposes: Clarification of Legal Principles, Practical Application, Training and Education, Decision-Making Support, Promotion of Compliance and Accountability, Standardisation and Consistency.

The International Humanitarian Law manual for our armed forces is regularly updated and revised to reflect developments in international law, emerging challenges in armed conflict, and evolving military technologies. It will also have to deal with initiatives like the EWIPA declaration. Our manual, currently from 2013, provides guidance on addressing contemporary issues such as cyber warfare, autonomous weapons systems, and the protection of civilians in urban warfare settings. It is aimed to providing

practical guidance for our forces, and upholding the rights and protections afforded to individuals affected by war. It serves as an indispensable tool for fostering a culture of respect for human dignity and the rule of law in times of crisis and armed conflicts.

Finally, we educate our military planners on the implications of using explosive weapons in populated areas and the importance of compliance with International Humanitarian Law, and we conduct specialised training programmes on International Humanitarian Law for officers and commanders. Both are crucial for minimising harm to civilians during armed conflict.

In summary, efforts to educate military personnel on the implications of using explosive weapons in populated areas, and by providing training, resources, and guidance, military organisations can empower officers and commanders to make decisions that uphold humanitarian principles and mitigate the human cost of warfare.

Thank you once again for your attention and participation. In closing, let us unit in our commitments to protect civilians from devastating impact of explosive weapons.

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