

**Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment
to International Humanitarian Law**
First State Consultation on Prevention Good Practices
Geneva, 13 May 2025

Statement by

H.E. Ms. Désirée SCHWEITZER

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

*Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations
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Thank you Madam Chair,

Collectively standing up for our shared humanity and preserving the laws designed to protect civilians is essential to prevent and minimise suffering caused to them.

Preventing harm is at the core of IHL limiting and restricting the means or weaponry to be used in armed conflict, including prohibiting weapons that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering and prohibit weapons that do not allow a distinction between civilian and military objects and whose effects cannot be limited.

The Mine Ban Convention, the Cluster Munitions Convention, the Biological and the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons fall into this category. Austria is a strong advocate and promoter of all of these important legal instruments. We are convinced that they are essential for our collective security and for upholding our shared principles of humanity. We therefore need to do more to strengthen and further universalise these prohibition norms.

To establish norms and guardrails for the role of AI in society and thereby prevent the most negative consequences of applications of AI in the military field is another important pillar of prevention. Autonomous weapon systems that can select and engage targets without further human intervention raise profound moral, ethical, legal and humanitarian concerns.

Austria therefore takes the clear position that significant human control over autonomous weapon systems is necessary and supports the urgent international legal regulation of these weapon systems. Equally, in light of the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons use, as well as the clear lack of response capacities, prevention

of such an occurrence is essential and a legitimate security concern of all states. The only way to completely eliminate the risks inherent in nuclear weapons is their elimination.

Another one of the most important components in the prevention of IHL violations is training. In our experience, IHL training has proven to be an effective tool in creating a common peer culture of compliance with IHL among trained persons. It serves to ensure that conduct in compliance with IHL becomes firmly embedded in the routine mechanisms of action and members of the armed forces adhere to it even under the extreme stress of combat situations.

Since 2004, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence biennially organises the three-week “Vienna Courses on International Law for Military Legal Advisors” provided under the auspices of the European Security and Defence College with the aim of contributing to the establishment of a common European security culture.

In 2016, our Ministry of Defence, together with the Ministry of Armed Forces of Senegal and UNOWAS, organised a training on peace operations in Dakar focused on the protection of civilians, children and persons in vulnerable situations. Furthermore, the Austrian Ministry of Defence regularly organises the – also UN-certified – “ESDC Course on the Comprehensive Protection of Civilians”.

Prevention – in the two forms of general prevention and individual prevention – is also the rationale of modern criminal law, which rightfully rejects retaliation as the purpose of criminal law sanctions. In the context of preventing IHL violations, the enforcement of international criminal responsibility has preeminent importance.

Austria is a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court since 2002. The Austrian Parliament has also incorporated the norms of the Rome Statute penalising violations of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols into the Austrian Criminal Code. The Criminal Code now specifically penalises:

- “war crimes against persons”;
- “war crimes against properties and other rights”;
- “war crimes against international missions and misuse of protective and national emblems”;
- “war crimes by deploying prohibited methods of warfare”; and
- “war crimes by deploying prohibited means of warfare”.

The criminal sanctions provided for the commission of these crimes are among the highest prescribed in Austrian criminal law. In cases, where their commission results in the intentional killing of a person, the punishment may be from ten to twenty years’ imprisonment or life imprisonment. These criminal sanctions are considered as adequate to effectively contribute to the prevention of the serious IHL violations mentioned above.

Thank you very much.