

**Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment  
to International Humanitarian Law**

**First State Consultation on National Committees for International Humanitarian Law**

**Geneva, 7 May 2025**

*Statement by*

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Thank you, Madam/Mister Chair.

We thank the ICRC and the co-chairs of the Workstream on National Committees for International Humanitarian Law – Germany, the Philippines, Peru and the United Kingdom – for convening this important and topical first round of consultations.

IHL currently faces many challenges. In responding to these challenges, it is a paramount underlying necessity that states develop a greater sense of ownership for IHL, including through enhanced dialogue among national IHL stakeholders and within society as such.

In this context, the work of National IHL Committees is most essential.

Austria founded its National IHL Committee in 1988. Since then, the Committee has proved as an invaluable institution for the promotion of IHL in Austria as well as the development and coordination of our IHL activities at international level. All relevant IHL actors in Austria, including from government, academia and civil society are represented in our National IHL Committee.

After operating on an ad-hoc basis for a number of years, the mandate of the Austrian IHL Committee was finally formalised in the Austrian Red Cross Act in 2021. The Act regulates the membership, mandate and tasks of the National IHL Committee as well as the frequency of meetings. Thus, the Committee is chaired jointly by the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs and the Austrian Red Cross.

All Federal Ministers may delegate representatives to the National Committee. Generally, the Departments of Public International Law, Disarmament and Humanitarian Assistance from the Foreign Ministry, as well as representatives of the Federal Ministries of Defence, Justice, the

Interior, Education and Social Affairs regularly participate in meetings. Furthermore, the IHL Committee works closely with Austrian universities who are often participating in meetings as guests on specific IHL topics. The National Committee meets twice per year.

Pursuant to the Austrian Red Cross Act, the Committee's mandate includes the dissemination of knowledge on IHL in Austria; advising the members of the Federal Government on the fulfilment of the obligations of the Republic of Austria under the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols; and coordinating the implementation of the pledges made by Austria and the Austrian Red Cross at the International Conferences of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. In addition, the Committee also serves as a forum for exchange on topical IHL issues and Austrian foreign policy, and has a coordinating role regarding the ratification of IHL instruments.

Among the subjects discussed during the last meetings of the Committee were issues of humanitarian disarmament, and the protection of civilians, such as Austria's engagement in the areas of lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS), the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, and the avoidance of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA).

The Committee concerned itself with the Austrian Position Paper on Cyber Activities and International Law, the enforcement of international criminal responsibility for the crime of aggression and proceedings related to armed conflicts before various international courts and tribunals. It considered current IHL topics discussed in Geneva, such as the protection of medical missions, voluntary reports on national IHL implementation and the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict.

Furthermore, the Committee developed, drafted and coordinated the pledges submitted by Austria and the Austrian Red Cross at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. It also discussed general activities of the Austrian Red Cross in disseminating knowledge on IHL as well as legislative initiatives and international treaties relating to IHL or the Austrian Red Cross.

Austria also actively supports the exchange among National IHL Committees. Thus, in fulfilment of a pledge made at the 33rd International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference, Austria in cooperation with ICRC, organised a European Regional Conference of National IHL Committees, which took place in Vienna on 13 and 14 March 2023. The conference offered an opportunity to exchange views on the organisation and core work of National IHL Committees, the clarification of the fate of missing persons, EWIPA, universal jurisdiction and humanitarian exceptions to sanctions. Other topics discussed included the automatisisation and digitalisation of warfare.

The Conference provided an important opportunity to foster the cooperation between the National IHL Committees of our region and the relevant stakeholders in countries, where they had not yet been established.

We are in favour of exploring further ways on how to benefit from the fruitful exchange among National IHL Committees for the benefit of strengthening the respect for IHL globally.

Thank you very much.