



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Swiss Confederation

Global IHL Initiative

Naval Warfare

(Workstream 7)

First State Consultation

Geneva, 4 June 2025

Statement by Switzerland

Good afternoon,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Dear Colleagues,

As a landlocked country, Switzerland's expertise in terms of naval warfare is limited.

However, a diligent implementation of IHL – which remains as relevant than ever - is necessary wherever a conflict is taking place, whether on land, at sea or in the cyber-space. We hence commend the global initiative's efforts in bringing attention to the topic discussed today.

A particular thanks to the ICRC experts that we just heard for their very insightful presentations, highlighting in particular the cost of naval warfare on civilians, those no longer participating in hostilities, civilian infrastructure and the environment.

Switzerland is looking forward to rich exchanges pertaining to various questions that merit further thoughts, such as, for instance:

The applicability of IHL: When is IHL applicable to incidents at sea?

The use of new technologies: What new questions do arise from the use of new technologies within this context?

The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and in particular the infrastructure necessary to maintain essential services: How does IHL protect civilian infrastructure at sea?

Within the scope of these discussions, it is essential that we insist on the good faith interpretation of IHL rules, in line with the very spirit of IHL: to protect the victims of war and uphold the dignity of humanity. IHL is not a permissive body of law, but a protective one.

We remain alarmed by the current trend towards an overly permissive or outdated interpretation of IHL rules, which sometimes goes as far as interpreting IHL to justify violations of its own rules.

The permissive interpretation of IHL affects the most fundamental rules and principles governing the conduct of hostilities, such as the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack. These rules are equally important for naval warfare than for other contexts. They also pertain to the protection of civilian infrastructure necessary to maintain essential services, a central aspect of this body of law.

We very much look forward to the discussion within this workstream which will hopefully come out with more guidance on how to best preserve humanity in conflict at sea.