ICRC Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law

Workstream 4: Protecting Civilian Infrastructure

Second State Consultation

Statement of Australia

3 November 2025

Good morning excellencies, colleagues

Let me start by thanking the ICRC for convening this important and timely forum. Our sincere thanks also to the co-chairs Algeria, Costa Rica, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia, for your tireless work in bringing us together today.

Australia is proud to be part of the Global Initiative. In particular, we are pleased to be co-chairing Workstream One of the Global Initiative. As others in this room are all too aware, this forum is important and timely because respect for international humanitarian law is being severely undermined. Calls for compliance are not being heard. There is much that we need to defend.

We read with interest the concept note circulated ahead of the Second State Consultation on Workstream 4 - Protecting Civilian Infrastructure. I propose to address in this statement several of the themes and guiding questions set out in that note.

I'll firstly address issues raised by session one, in particular those relating to targeting and verification procedures.

The Australian Defence Force conducts military operations in accordance with Australia's obligations under international law, especially international humanitarian law. Australian Defence Force doctrine provides high-level guidance for commanders and staff on targeting procedures. Legal advisors play an indivisible role advising Commanders, including throughout targeting processes.

Australia's approach to all elements of warfighting, from Rules of Engagement to targeting and beyond, is that parameters may be more restrictive than permitted under international law and international humanitarian law, but never more permissive. All Australian Defence Force personnel are provided with contextual training and education on international humanitarian law, and Australia employs robust targeting approval procedures and processes.

Turning now to session two and questions posed regarding 'no-strike' lists, Australian Defence Force doctrine provides guidance for ensuring targeting processes align with Australia's obligations under international law, especially international humanitarian law.

For example, the 'no-strike list' is a list of objects or entities which are not permitted to be attacked in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law and/or Rules of Engagement.

Commanders and staff involved in the planning and execution of targeting activities are required to understand and apply the rules related to targeting.

With respect to session four and its focus on measures to prevent, mitigate and respond to harm to civilian infrastructure and civilians, Australia notes that international initiatives can play a role to energise political commitment to international humanitarian law and translate that commitment into practical action. The Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel is one such initiative – it renews international commitment to upholding IHL and protecting aid workers. For example, the Declaration [*Paragraph 21.2(e)*] calls for support for civil-military training and coordination that promotes an enabling environment for humanitarian assistance in line with humanitarian principles and minimises risks of incidental harm to humanitarian personnel. 110 countries to date have signed the Declaration – we encourage all countries to join.

Australia is also pleased to have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, Australia reaffirmed its commitment to the protection of children affected by armed conflict and expressed our political commitment to advance the principles of the Declaration. We continue support the Declaration to reinforce the protections that international humanitarian law provides to civilians and civilian objects.

Thank you once again for allowing me to take the floor and I look forward to the fruitful discussions today.