

**Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment
to International Humanitarian Law
Third State Consultation on the Protection of Civilian Infrastructure**

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Statement by

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Thank you, Madam/Mister Chair.

The Norwegian Red Cross welcomes this discussion, considering the crucial function civilian infrastructure has in relation to the delivery of essential services to civilians. As we know, essential services depend on three critical and interdependent elements in order to function: hardware, consumables, and people. Disruption occurs when any one of these elements is compromised. Today, I would like to focus on the people — essential service providers.

Recent research¹ and operational engagement by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, including directly with frontline services personnel, emphasizes the deadly operating environment essential service providers find themselves in during armed conflict.

Repairing power lines, operating water treatment plants or restarting pumping stations cannot be done from afar. The duties of essential service providers require repeated access to exposed infrastructure, which, and in particular when damaged by hostilities, are often located near or across front lines. This exposes personnel not only to the risks of shelling and being caught in crossfire but also to unexploded ordnance (UXO), landmines, and booby traps.

UN Security Council Resolution 2573 already some years ago drew attention to the need to better protect and facilitate safe passage for essential service providers during armed

¹ ICRC and Norwegian Red Cross, *Keeping the Lights On and the Taps Running: Protecting and Facilitating Safer Access for Essential Service Providers in Armed Conflict*, Oslo, 2024; Caroline Baudot et al., *Beyond infrastructure: The protection of essential services personnel in the spirit of international humanitarian law*, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 1, 2026.

conflict.² The groundwork for this can and should already be laid by states in peacetime, including with the following concrete measures:

1. States should **improve their understanding** of the vulnerabilities engrained in interdependent essential services networks, the risks faced by essential services providers, and the potentially far-reaching consequences of system failure.
2. Relevant municipal, regional and national authorities should **develop emergency preparedness and crisis response plans with and for essential service providers**, focusing on staff safety and security during hostilities. This may include devising protocols enabling escorting of vehicles and personnel by impartial humanitarian organizations, improving passive protection measures for staff and infrastructure, or investing in the gradual automation of service infrastructure to reduce risk exposure by allowing remote operation and monitoring.
3. **The military** may be involved, where relevant, in the development of such contingency plans, and trained to understand, prevent and mitigate harm to essential service providers.
4. Together with essential service providers and other stakeholders, states may also **consider the feasibility and protective impact of enhanced visible identification** of personnel operating, maintaining and repairing essential service networks.
5. And finally, **the protection of essential services providers should be made a political priority, to be reflected in military policies and practices**. Clear instructions from the national government level to enhance the protection of essential services providers in order to ensure the continued provision of essential services during conflict are a prerequisite to a corresponding change in military mindset.

The protection of essential services in armed conflict is not merely a technical concern or a legal question – it is an ongoing urgent humanitarian necessity requiring greater understanding and attention. However, protecting the infrastructure alone is not enough. Preserving the very conditions of civilian life in times of war requires us to also protect the systems that sustain this infrastructure, and this necessarily includes protecting the people who keep them running.

² See recommendation 9 of UN Security Council Resolution 2573: “*Encourages all efforts to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and civilian infrastructure that is critical to enable the delivery of essential services in armed conflict, upon request, to meet the basic needs of the civilian population, including by: (a) Protection of civilians operating, maintaining or repairing these objects, as well as their movement for the purpose of maintaining, repairing or operating such objects; (b) Allowing and facilitating safe passage of equipment, transport and supplies necessary for the reparation, maintenance or operation of such objects;*”