

## **Philippine Statement**

### **Third State Consultation on Naval Warfare (Workstream 7, Global Initiative on IHL)**

12 February 2026

(Please check against delivery)

Chair,

Excellencies

Distinguished colleagues,

We thank the co-chairs Egypt, Indonesia, and the ICRC, and welcome this third consultation. I request for your indulgence should I exceed the time limit a bit, as this discussion is an important one.

The Philippines reaffirms that International Humanitarian Law applies fully to armed conflict at sea, alongside and in complementarity with the law of the sea. The obligations to search for, collect, care for, identify, and protect the wounded, sick, shipwrecked, dead, and detainees must remain central to all maritime operations.

The Philippines underscores that IHL applies fully to maritime operations once the factual threshold of armed conflict at sea is met. These obligations protect all persons affected by hostilities, including civilians on commercial and other civilian vessels, and remain binding regardless of operational complexity. The applicability of IHL is determined by the factual circumstances and humanitarian effects of violence, and not solely by the characterization of operations. Where violence at sea results in wounded, shipwrecked, detained persons, or civilian harm within an armed conflict, the corresponding IHL obligations must apply, whether activities are described as military, security, or law-enforcement in nature.

As a large archipelagic State with extensive coastlines, dense ports, narrow straits, and major civilian shipping routes, the Philippines is acutely aware that contemporary maritime environments increasingly bring civilians into proximity with hostilities. The faithful application of IHL at sea is therefore not only about combatants — it is fundamentally about the protection of civilians and civilian vessels.

In this regard, the Philippines emphasizes that once armed conflict factually exists, IHL protections are engaged wherever the humanitarian effects of

hostilities impact persons at sea, including civilians present on commercial, fishing, and other civilian vessels, irrespective of the purpose of their voyage. Protecting civilian life and ensuring rapid humanitarian rescue must remain a core operational priority.

For belligerents, core challenges include divergent interpretations of IHL, limited operational integration of humanitarian obligations, resource constraints, and the extreme risks posed by active hostilities at sea. These challenges can be addressed by embedding IHL into doctrine and rules of engagement, expanding specialized training for maritime and security forces, strengthening inter-agency coordination, and investing in evacuation, medical, and rescue capabilities.

Neutral States and civilian vessels play an indispensable humanitarian role in maritime rescue and evacuation. The Philippines stresses that humanitarian assistance by neutral actors, when undertaken with due coordination and respect for applicable legal frameworks, contributes to predictability, de-escalation, and the protection of life at sea. Respect for the sovereignty and jurisdiction of coastal and archipelagic States is fully compatible with — and essential to — the effective implementation of IHL obligations at sea. Sovereignty should serve as a foundation for compliance and coordination, not as a barrier to humanitarian protection.

At the national level, the Philippines continues to strengthen IHL-aligned doctrine, standard operating procedures on shipwrecked persons and detainees, the deployment of hospital ships, and a whole-of-government approach integrating maritime, defense, disaster response, and humanitarian institutions. These measures enhance preparedness to protect both combatants and civilians in maritime crises.

On identification and accounting, emerging technologies — including unmanned systems and responsibly governed artificial intelligence — offer promising tools to locate casualties, improve situational awareness, and prevent persons from going missing at sea, when employed under State responsibility, with appropriate safeguards, and in full compliance with international law.

With regard to detention at sea, humane treatment remains a core obligation. Even where detention is temporary and operationally constrained, fundamental IHL standards of humane treatment, accountability, and protection continue to apply. States must ensure adequate onboard conditions, trained personnel, clear procedures, and prompt transfer to appropriate land-based facilities.

Finally, the Philippines underscores the importance of sustained inter-State cooperation — through shared training, interoperable procedures,

resource-pooling arrangements, and the exchange of good practices — to translate legal obligations into operational reality.

In closing, the Philippines reiterates that respect for IHL at sea is a humanitarian imperative. IHL must be applied consistently wherever armed conflict occurs, including in maritime environments. Upholding IHL obligations protects civilians, preserves dignity, prevents disappearance, and contributes to de-escalation and peace.

Thank you.