National statement of the Republic of Slovenia

at the

Third State Consultation on Protecting Civilian Infrastructure

Geneva, 3 February 2026

Distinguished participants,

Slovenia is pleased to participate in the Third State Consultation on the Protection of Civilian Infrastructure and to serve as co-chair. We value this opportunity to exchange views with states on how to strengthen the protection of civilians in contemporary armed conflicts.

In this initial contribution, Slovenia will focus on the consultation's first two objectives: the implementation of precautionary obligations under international humanitarian law, and the role of protected zones in enhancing the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure in armed conflicts.

The growing impact of hostilities in urban environments is concerning, given the high density of civilians and civilian objects, and the prevalence of dual-use infrastructure, which significantly increases risks to the civilian population. In this regard, Slovenia emphasises the importance of the **precautionary obligations** set out in Articles 57 and 58 of Additional Protocol I to 1949 Geneva Conventions. These complementary obligations, applicable to attacking and defending parties respectively, are essential to enhancing the protection of civilians and civilian objects in populated areas.

However, measures such as the removal of civilian population, individual civilians and civilian objects from the vicinity of military objectives are not always feasible, particularly in densely populated areas where alternative housing is not always available and in cases of severe weather. In this context, Slovenia recognises the value of responsibly using emerging technologies to reduce civilian harm, including improved sensing tools that detect people and provide data on the location of the civilian population and potential dangers from ongoing hostilities.

Slovenia considers **protected zones** to be an important tool for enhancing the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. International humanitarian law provides for five categories of such zones, offering a legal framework that reduces the exposure of civilians and critical infrastructure to the effects of hostilities. This legal framework is complemented by the annexes to the First and Fourth Geneva Conventions, which include draft model agreements providing practical guidance for

parties willing to establish such zones in good faith. Although the establishment of protected zones is voluntary, Slovenia emphasises that this does not diminish their humanitarian value, and welcomes initiatives by impartial organisations, including the ICRC, that aim to facilitate their establishment.

At the same time, Slovenia stresses that strict conditions must be respected for protected zones to be effective and credible. Furthermore, Slovenia emphasises that protected zones can only function where there is a genuine willingness among the parties to respect the rules of international humanitarian law, including the obligation to spare civilians and civilian objects. Robust supervision, monitoring and verification mechanisms are therefore essential to maintain trust, ensure compliance and prevent the misuse of such zones.

Among the protected zones envisaged under international humanitarian law, demilitarised zones established under Article 60 of Additional Protocol I are designed to protect the civilian population and civilian objects. Neutralised zones under Article 15 of the Fourth Geneva Convention also contribute to civilian protection by sheltering civilians and the wounded from the effects of hostilities. International humanitarian law also allows for the creation of non-defended localities under Article 59 of Additional Protocol I through a unilateral declaration, provided that the conditions set out in the provision are met. In contrast, safety zones under Article 14 of the Fourth Geneva Convention have a limited scope as they are intended to protect only specific vulnerable categories of civilians.

Thank you.

Slovenia will now address the remaining objectives of this consultation, with a particular focus on the misuse of civilian infrastructure and the standards governing its destruction and seizure.

With regard to the challenges to the continued delivery of essential services arising from the **misuse of civilian infrastructure**, Slovenia emphasises the particular importance of the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure. Slovenia considers this list to be an important practical tool that reinforces existing obligations under international humanitarian law and provides concrete guidance on protecting water and water-related infrastructure during armed conflict. In this context, Slovenia highlights Principle 4, which calls upon parties to a conflict to refrain from weaponising water and water-related infrastructure. Where such infrastructure is nevertheless used for military operations, the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution must be respected.

Depending on the degree of control exercised over such infrastructure and the level of violence involved, civilian infrastructure under the control of a party to an armed conflict may be subject to rules concerning the **destruction or seizure of property**, rules governing military operations that fall short of an attack, or rules governing attacks.

The requirement of imperative military necessity applies when a party to the conflict seeks to destroy or seize civilian infrastructure under their physical or tactical control, as in situations of occupation. This requirement is strict and is understood as a constraint of such vital importance that it leaves no other choice. The rules and

principles applicable to attacks, such as distinction, proportionality and precautions, apply to acts of violence during hostilities. Slovenia defines an attack as an act that is reasonably expected to cause injury or death to individuals, or damage or destruction to objects.

Furthermore, civilians enjoy general protection against dangers arising from military operations that do not constitute an attack. When conducting such operations, every effort must be made to spare the civilian population and civilian objects. This requires parties to the conflict to consider the impact of such operations on civilian infrastructure and essential civilian services.

Slovenia emphasises that the destruction or seizure of civilian infrastructure can have severe humanitarian consequences. Disruptions to electricity, water supply, healthcare or food production, for example, may exceed military necessity and undermine the survival and dignity of the civilian population.

Slovenia also reaffirms the importance of the 2022 Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, viewing it as a key political commitment to reducing civilian harm. In this regard, Slovenia highlights its active engagement in implementing and promoting the declaration, as well as its dedication to translating other political commitments into concrete action aimed at strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict. For example, as part of its involvement in the Global Alliance to Spare Water from Armed Conflict, Slovenia is deeply committed to protecting water infrastructure and recognises the essential role of water in ensuring the survival and dignity of civilians.

Thank you.