

Statement by the United Service Institution of India
Fifth Round of State Consultations — Workstream 1: Prevention Good Practices
25 June 2026, Geneva

Thank you, Co-Chairs.

The United Service Institution of India — founded in 1870, and Asia's oldest institution dedicated to defence and security studies — is honoured to take the floor at this fifth and final round of consultations on Prevention Good Practices, and to do so on what is, in many respects, the foundational workstream of this entire Initiative. We commend Australia, Austria, Kenya, the United Arab Emirates and the ICRC for producing a text that is, in our view, genuinely ambitious in its architecture — one that refuses to treat IHL compliance as merely a legal or technical problem, and instead names it for what it truly is: a test of institutional resilience, professional culture, and collective moral commitment. We note with appreciation the breadth of participation this week, from Italy, Chile and Colombia to South Sudan, the Sovereign Order of Malta and CIVIC, each bringing perspectives that together illuminate just how universal — and how unevenly distributed — the challenge of prevention actually is.

We also wish to note why this workstream feels so particularly urgent at this moment. The document opens with a truth that deserves to be spoken plainly: violations of IHL do not occur in isolation. They emerge from gradual processes — the normalization of dehumanizing rhetoric, the erosion of command discipline, the failure of institutional safeguards to detect drift before it becomes catastrophe. Chile said it with precision this week: IHL violations rarely occur in isolation; they are the end point of processes that went uncorrected. Brazil added the necessary corollary: retaliatory violations remain violations regardless of the provocation that preceded them. These are not abstract propositions. They describe the operational reality of virtually every contemporary armed conflict, and this Outcome Document is one of the most serious attempts the international community has made to address the conditions that produce violations, rather than merely responding to violations after they occur.

USI offers five observations, grounded in our institutional mandate at the intersection of military doctrine, professional education, and defence policy engagement.

First, we would like to note that the outcome document's three-pillar structure — strengthen institutions, anchor identities in humanity, embed safeguards — is analytically sound and USI endorses it fully. We wish, however, to emphasize that the pillars are not parallel; they are sequential and interdependent in a specific way. Institutions are the primary vehicle through which all other prevention measures are transmitted and sustained. An individual soldier's identity and values, however strong, will not survive sustained operational pressure without the institutional architecture — clear command structures, robust rules of engagement, embedded legal advisers, functioning accountability mechanisms — to support and reinforce them. The Outcome Document is right to place political ownership and institutional competence before identity and safeguards in its logical sequence, and USI would encourage the final text to make that dependency explicit.

We associate ourselves strongly with the call from Italy, Belgium, and Mexico to embed IHL compliance in institutional culture rather than treating it as a discrete training event or legal annex. The distinction between compliance as an institutional standard and compliance as a periodic obligation is, in our experience from professional military education, one of the most

decisive variables in whether law actually holds under the extraordinary pressures of armed conflict.

Second, USI particularly welcomes the document's emphasis under Outcome 3(e) on embedding legal awareness and expertise within military planning and operational structures, with the professional independence to provide timely advice that is actively sought and applied in decision-making. This is a point Chile illustrated through its own practice of embedding legal advisers at all levels of military command to review operational plans. A standard USI has long championed in its own curriculum and in its engagement with India's Ministry of Defence is ensuring appropriate legal insights and incorporation in operational planning as a mix of education, training, practise, review and discussions on IHL/LOAC amongst operational commanders and staff at all levels, including development of operational law expertise and utilisation of the same in command structures.

The USA's recommendation to explicitly include military manuals among operational guidance tools is well-taken — military manuals are the single most important doctrinal vehicle for translating legal obligation into the operational decisions of commanders and their place in the prevention architecture should be explicit rather than implied.

Third, the document's attention to dehumanizing language and professional culture — under Outcome 4(b) — is, in USI's assessment, one of its most valuable and underappreciated contributions. Belgium and Chile both identified dehumanization as a key driver of IHL violations, and the Sovereign Order of Malta made a point that deserves wider recognition: religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and community actors often have access to early warning signals of dehumanization and cultural drift that state institutions do not. The document's encouragement of civil-military cooperation and community engagement — under Outcome 7(b) — should be read with this in mind: prevention is not solely a government or military function. It requires the active participation of the broader social fabric in which military institutions are embedded.

USI would add one doctrinal point on peer culture and small-unit dynamics under Outcome 4(c) that our experience in professional military education underscores: the most important variable in preventing violations at the operational level is not individual knowledge of IHL rules but the norms of the unit. Non-commissioned officers and junior commanders are the decisive actors in shaping whether those norms support or undermine lawful conduct. Training and scenario-based exercises that equip junior officers specifically to recognize and correct cultural drift — before it produces violations — are among the highest-value prevention investments a military institution can make.

Fourth, the Safeguards pillar under Outcomes 8-10 is, in USI's view, the most operationally innovative section of the entire document. The emphasis on early detection — monitoring risk indicators, enabling safe reporting, linking detection to corrective action — reframes prevention as a continuous institutional discipline rather than a reactive process. We particularly support the attention under Outcome 9 to confidential reporting channels and protection against retaliation: the most persistent failure mode in institutional accountability is not the absence of rules but the silence of those who see violations beginning and cannot safely speak.

The IHFFC's role in investigation and accountability — endorsed by Poland, Switzerland and Italy — deserves strong support from USI. India's broader engagement with international

accountability mechanisms reflects a recognition that national systems, however robust, benefit from the legitimacy and impartiality that independent international mechanisms provide.

Finally, USI wishes to endorse France's call for technical support and international cooperation in implementing these recommendations, and the Philippines' recommendation for phased, scalable, and resource-sensitive implementation supported by capacity-building and peer exchange. The prevention framework this document proposes is sophisticated and demanding; its effective implementation requires not only political will but institutional capacity that is unevenly distributed globally. South-South cooperation, regional peer exchange, and the involvement of think tanks and professional military education institutions — precisely the kind of Track 1.5 engagement USI represents — are indispensable to translating this text into durable practice across the full diversity of national contexts represented in this room.

USI looks forward to incorporating these reflections into its forthcoming White Paper on the Global IHL Initiative, and to contributing its institutional expertise to the Global IHL Dialogue in Geneva in November and the High-Level Conference in Amman in December.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In solidarity,

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