

Statement by the United Service Institution of India

Fifth Round of State Consultations — Workstream 2: National IHL Committees

24 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 — takes the floor with particular appreciation for this workstream. We commend Germany, Peru, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and the ICRC for producing a document that is, in our view, a model of what multilateral guidance at its best can achieve: ambitious in its vision, precise in its recommendations, and — critically — humble enough to acknowledge that there is no single institutional model that fits every national context. We note with admiration the breadth of engagement this process has attracted, with over 100 states having participated across all rounds, and a closing discussion this week that brought in voices as diverse as Finland's thirty-three-year-old committee, Cuba's newly established one, and Burundi's aspiration to create its first. That spectrum is itself proof that this document has succeeded in being genuinely inclusive rather than merely universally aspirational.

USI wishes to register at the outset why this workstream resonates with particular force from our institutional vantage point. We are not a government body; we are a Track 1.5 defence and security studies institution with a long relationship with India's Ministry of Defence, its armed forces, and its broader national security community. That positioning means we are precisely the kind of institution — academic, expert, independent but engaged — that a well-functioning national IHL committee should be drawing upon for research, doctrine review, scenario-based training, and policy analysis. The document's recognition in Annex I, Section 4(g) that committees should have the power to consult, on an ad hoc basis, research institutions and humanitarian organizations with demonstrated relevant expertise is a provision USI endorses wholeheartedly, and we would encourage states to read it expansively rather than narrowly.

USI offers four observations grounded in that institutional perspective. First, we fully endorse the document's non-binding, voluntary, and context-sensitive character, affirmed this week by the United States, Georgia, Mexico, South Korea, and others. The strength of this document lies precisely in its flexibility. It does not prescribe a single model of committee — it provides a framework within which each state can calibrate structure, mandate, composition and working methods to its own legal traditions, institutional capacities, and national priorities. South Korea's proposal that key ministerial representation be recommended rather than prescribed is a sensible refinement in this spirit, and USI supports it. Different states build effective committees in different ways; Indonesia's committee has functioned for 46 years without being a replica of Poland's or Chile's, and the document wisely preserves that diversity.

Second, USI strongly endorses the document's emphasis — welcomed by Austria, Jordan and Honduras — on committees as proactive advisory and early-warning bodies, not merely reactive coordination platforms. The distinction is consequential. A committee that only convenes when a legal question is formally referred to it is qualitatively different from one empowered to identify emerging compliance concerns, raise them through government channels on its own initiative, and advise decision-makers before situations escalate. The language under Outcome 3 and Annex I, Section 2 correctly frames this as an advisory board and early internal government alert mechanism — language USI would urge be preserved without dilution in the final text.

This proactive function is especially valuable in peacetime, and the document's articulation of the committee's role before, during and after armed conflict under Annex I, Section 3 is genuinely innovative. The idea that a committee should also be operationally relevant during hostilities — advising on evolving legal obligations, monitoring emerging challenges, and contributing to peace negotiations — represents a significant evolution from treating these mechanisms as purely legislative coordination bodies, and USI welcomes it, while advocating adherence in practice to objective, balanced and non-partisan norms at all times to ensure credibility, relevance and value.

Third, USI notes Finland's concern — which deserves serious attention — that additional monitoring and reporting obligations across seven workstreams risk overburdening national IHL committees and diverting resources from substantive IHL work. This is a practical institutional reality. Committees are often small, under-resourced, and reliant on the part-time attention of officials with primary responsibilities elsewhere. Indonesia identified high staff turnover and loss of institutional memory as among the most persistent challenges it faces. South Africa called for transparent budgeting and multi-year support mechanisms. Uruguay was candid about the unevenness of its committee's activity over thirty years.

USI's institutional experience suggests that the monitoring and reporting framework must be proportionate to committee capacity, and that the burden of demonstrating implementation should fall on the process — through voluntary reports, regional peer reviews, and universal meetings — rather than on committees as a standing obligation. The document's voluntary reporting model is the right approach, and USI would support framing it in those terms consistently throughout the final text.

Fourth and finally, USI strongly supports the "Stronger Together" architecture under Outcome 2 and the terms of reference for regional and global platforms under Annex II. Poland's Warsaw conference, bringing together 33 states and over 110 participants, is an illustration of what structured regional peer engagement can accomplish. Kuwait's engagement in Arab regional cooperation initiatives and Ecuador's national committee's role in training armed forces demonstrate that committees generate knowledge that is most valuable when shared. USI would particularly welcome the inclusion of defence and security research institutions — alongside Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, academia and civil society — as recognized participants in those regional exchanges, precisely because doctrine, PME, and operational practice are the transmission mechanisms through which committee advice becomes field reality.

USI looks forward to supporting the implementation of this Outcome Document through its own research, drafting a White Paper on the deliberations, and – if given the opportunity – contributing 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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