Mr. Chair,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the urgent issue of protecting civilians in urban warfare and the challenges related to the use of explosive weapons.

Germany is gravely concerned at the humanitarian harm being caused during active hostilities, often due to a lack of compliance with or ineffective implementation of IHL when it comes to the use of explosive weapons in urban contexts. The international community needs to act to achieve changes in conduct in order to attain a more effective implementation of IHL and a significantly improved protection of civilians.

Germany is pleased that at the Vienna conference on “Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare”, the vast majority of the 133 participating States signaled their support for a political declaration that focuses on improving the protection of civilians through strict compliance with IHL. We welcome that the operational approach Germany has developed, which aims at strengthening compliance with
existing rules of international humanitarian law through the development and sharing of military good practices, has found wide acceptance. We are confident that this approach will make it possible to achieve concrete improvements in the protection of the civilian population.

For the effective implementation of IHL principles – humanity, distinction, necessity and proportionality – adequate capabilities are needed. This demands a holistic approach that encompasses heightened awareness and appropriate reflection in military doctrines, strategic directives, tactical instructions, rules of engagement, education, training and exercises of armed forces as well as thorough testing and documentation of new weapons, means and methods of warfare before fielding. Awareness should be enhanced through mechanisms to share good practices and through strengthening cooperation and assistance, which can provide new avenues to better address the needs and specific circumstances of States.

A more detailed description of ways to reduce risks and to mitigate harm to civilians from the effects of explosive weapons in urbanised environments can be found in the German working paper: “Practical measures to improve policies and practices to reduce civilian harm from explosive weapons in urban conflict”.

Efforts of reducing civilian casualties promote the objectives and purposes of the CCW, whose preamble recalls the “general principle of the protection of the civilian population against the effects of hostilities.” The CCW is an inclusive forum with the necessary participation of military experts and the mandate “to continue the codification” of rules applicable to armed conflict especially with a view to conventional weapons. Therefore, it is a relevant and competent forum to further discuss this topic. No new IHL norms are needed but the aim should
be to start a debate also within the CCW to develop and share good practices for the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Thank you Mr. Chair