Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

Agenda Item 9. Emerging Issues in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention

Statement Austria

Mr. President,

Austria continues to believe that the agenda item Emerging Issues in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention, has proved beneficial for strengthening the CCW. We consider it important that High Contracting Parties are in the position to bring up issues of concern within a structured manner in the Convention. We consider all efforts on mitigating the harm caused by EWIPA to civilians are mutually reinforcing. In order to effectively tackle the issue we need political commitment and technical expertise.

Last year many delegations raised the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects under this agenda item. Allow me to seize the opportunity today to update on recent developments in this area, as our Convention is firmly rooted in the IHL principles of proportionality, distinction and precautions in attack and thus efforts to strengthen IHL compliance are of direct relevance to the CCW. When more than 90% of victims of EWIPA are civilians, it is clear that the fundamental principles of proportionality and distinction are not adequately respected. All parties to armed conflict, including states and non-state actors must fully comply with IHL.

The fact that conflicts are increasingly taking place in urban areas brings substantial challenges to IHL. In urban areas civilians are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of armed conflict. The humanitarian impact of urban conflict on civilians is devastating. The use of EWIPA is a major cause for civilian harm. The humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons are severe and cross sectoral. The reverberating effects and the long lasting consequences of urban destruction severely impact civilian lives in conflict affected areas.

Therefore, Austria recently organised the Vienna Conference on Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare, in which more than 500 delegates from 133 States, the relevant international organisations, academia and civil society participated. We are heartened by the demonstrated interest to increase the protection of civilians in urban warfare. Only a few weeks ago, 71 States delivered a joint statement led by Ireland at the First Committee on EWIPA. Austria welcomes the recently issued Joint Appeal on the use of explosive weapons in cities by the United Nations Secretary General and the President of the ICRC, outlining the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare and we thank them for their explicit support for efforts of States to develop a political declaration. Austria is looking forward to the elaboration of a political declaration to strengthen the protection of civilians starting next week in Geneva and we encourage all States to actively take part in these deliberations and eventually adopt a political declaration.