2019 MEETING OF HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

AGENDA ITEM 9: Emerging Issues in the Context of the Objectives and Purposes of the Convention

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM
Geneva, 14 November 2019

Mr Chair

I would like to make some comments specifically in relation to Explosive Weapons with Wide Area Effects in Populated Areas, or EWIPA.

The United Kingdom reiterates that International Humanitarian Law (IHL) governs the use of lethal force in populated areas, as elsewhere. The UK strictly observes our obligations under international law and will continue to operate in accordance with the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality and necessity and the requirement for the precautions in attack – encouraging all combatants in all conflicts to do so too. We condemn the indiscriminate or disproportionate use of any weapon, including the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian objects.

The UK actively seeks to minimise the adverse effects of armed conflict on civilians, and to limit damage to infrastructure in any areas in which lethal force is employed. We will continue to investigate any suspected or reported incidents of civilian casualties or unanticipated damage to sensitive or critical infrastructure, and we remain committed to maintaining full accountability in the event of credible incidents attributable to UK military activity. However, it should be noted that it is sadly not possible to remove risk entirely – particularly when combatting armed groups who actively seek to exploit proximity to civilians and critical civilian infrastructure to further their ends.
Mr Chair,

We recognise that humanitarian considerations and perspectives are hugely important in the context of minimising civilian harm in conflict and welcome the recent international discussions organised by the government of Austria in Vienna, in which UK officials participated. However, it is also critical that discussions on EWIPA include appropriate military practitioners and reflect the realities of conflict environments and the policies, processes and training that inform and regulate the conduct of operations. To that end, we commend to High Contracting Parties the paper on EWIPA key principles co-authored by France, Germany and my own country, and the US technical compilation of practical measures, both of which mark a sound basis for future substantive discussions on this important subject.

In closing, the legitimate use of lethal force in any environment must continue to be bounded by robust Rules of Engagement and targeting processes which fully align with states’ obligations under IHL. The UK remains committed to sharing examples of good practice and will participate fully in forthcoming international discussions in order to ensure that legitimate humanitarian concerns are balanced against operational realities and requirements.

Thank you.

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