Madame Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu,

Mister Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Carbonnier,

Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,

Let me start by warmly welcoming all of you to the Vienna Conference “Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare”

It is a premiere – the first global conference on this issue.

In particular, I want to welcome the survivors of urban warfare who are here with us today.

Thank you for being here with us!

Your presence here not only honours us, it makes this whole conference worthwhile.

You remind us, that this conference is not about an academic debate on international law, but that it is about preventing human suffering!

Your voices must be heard!
Ladies and gentlemen,

The mechanics of war have changed.

Today, most fighting takes place in cities and villages.

When explosive weapons are used in these populated areas over 90 percent of the victims are civilians. 90 percent!

This is simply unacceptable!

In recent armed conflicts entire cities have been destroyed.

Every year, children, women and men are killed or mutilated by the tens of thousands.

When civilians do survive, they face terrible hardship.

No water supply or electricity, no health care or schools, no jobs, no income.

As a consequence, civilians often have no other choice than to leave their homes.

77 percent of Syrian refugees replied in a poll that this was for them the main reason for fleeing and
becoming *internally displaced people or migrants*.

Distinguished participants,

**The assessment is as clear as it is grim.**

In this urban warfare

*international humanitarian law is all too often violated*

**However, we do not need new legal norms.**

What we need,

* is **better and consistent**
  *implementation** of existing rules.

**International humanitarian law**

* can only protect civilians,
  * when it is respected.

I believe therefore, that the

best way to celebrate the **70th anniversary** of the

*Geneva Conventions*

would be a **renewed and real commitment**

to put their contents into action.

**Good practices** already exist,

* that can serve as a model*
  * even in challenging circumstances.

**But awareness raising is not enough.**

**We need visible action!**
The **UN Secretary-General**
and the **President of the International Committee of the Red Cross**
have issued a **joint appeal to stop** civilian devastation and suffering caused by explosive weapons in cities.

They **call for the elaboration of a Political Declaration.**

Like them, I believe that we need a **political approach** to address a political problem.

**Previous Political Declarations**
like the **Safe Schools Declaration**
have **succeeded in achieving more respect** for International Humanitarian Law and in **improving the situation on the ground.**

I therefore **urge you to be bold** when drafting this declaration!

To me

- victim assistance, training
- sharing good practices,
- reviewing national policies and data collection
would seem relevant.

Distinguished Delegates,
What we definitely cannot do,
is to sit idly by and do nothing.

We owe it to the millions of civilians
affected by urban warfare
to come up with a way forward.

Therefore, to me this conference is only the beginning.

We are embarking on a joint project
of states, international organisations
and civil society.

Let us all work to together to prevent human suffering
and make cities in conflicts
a safer place for civilians.

I urge you to engage.

I wish us all a successful conference.
Thank you for your attention.