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The situation in the Middle East

**Letter dated 6 March 2025 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the
Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to submit herewith information by the depositary of the Geneva Conventions dated 6 March 2025 regarding the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 34.

(Signed) Riccarda **Chanda**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Deputy Permanent Representative



Annex

[Original: English and French]

Information by the depositary of the Geneva Conventions**Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention**

Berne, 6 March 2025

1. Introduction

According to paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution [ES-10/24](#) of 18 September 2024, Switzerland, in its capacity as the depositary State of the Geneva Conventions, was invited to convene, within six months of the adoption of the resolution, a Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in times of war on measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to ensure respect thereof in accordance with common article 1 of the four Geneva Conventions.

The responsibilities of Switzerland, as the depositary State, are outlined in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. These include acting on behalf of and in the interests of the High Contracting Parties while maintaining impartiality.

In the past, Switzerland convened three similar conferences of High Contracting Parties – in 1999, 2001 and 2014 – based on resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. These conferences were prepared through a process of consultations with the High Contracting Parties' Geneva-based Permanent Missions and resulted in the adoption of political declarations by consensus. They were attended at the level of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations.

2. Process

In a notification to all High Contracting Parties dated 11 November 2024, the depositary announced that it had accepted the invitation to convene a Conference within the required time frame and would initiate the necessary consultations with the High Contracting Parties.

The depositary conducted consultations in Geneva with the High Contracting Parties from November 2024 until the end of February 2025, first to present the process and discuss the Parties' expectations, and second to discuss the modalities and a final outcome document of the Conference.

After several rounds of consultations, the depositary came to the understanding that a general agreement was emerging on the following elements:

- The modalities of the Conference of High Contracting Parties of 2014 should serve as a basis for the new Conference and the process that should lead to it.
- A draft declaration should be prepared through a Geneva-based consultation process, conducted through Permanent Missions.
- The consultations should be iterative, progressing from consultations on potential topics for inclusion in the declaration to the development of building blocks for a draft declaration, ultimately leading to a final declaration.
- The declaration should be finalized prior to the Conference.

- The declaration should be adopted by consensus among participating High Contracting Parties.

Regarding the possible content of the declaration, High Contracting Parties agreed that it should reaffirm the principles and content of the previous statement from 1999 and the declarations from 2001 and 2014, while also reflecting developments since 2014. Furthermore, it should reaffirm the fundamental rules and principles of international humanitarian law, avoid any weakening or relativizing of these rules and principles, and set out concrete measures to enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention and ensure its respect for the benefit of the civilians protected under the Convention.

On 20 December 2024, the depositary sent a first non-paper to all Permanent Missions in Geneva summarizing the general agreement on the preparatory process and the modalities of the Conference and outlining the topics that could be addressed in the declaration. On 31 January 2025, based on extensive consultations, the depositary circulated a second non-paper containing building blocks with suggested paragraphs for inclusion in the declaration to all Permanent Missions in Geneva. Based on another round of consultations, the depositary circulated a final draft declaration on 27 February 2025.

3. Conference

In a notification to all High Contracting Parties dated 27 February 2025, the depositary informed the Parties that the consultations held thus far had led it to draw the conclusion that cross-regional support existed for both the modalities discussed and the text for a final draft declaration. These two documents were drafted and revised during the consultations on the sole basis of comments and contributions from High Contracting Parties and based on international humanitarian law. On this basis, the depositary convened all High Contracting Parties to the Conference, scheduled to be held on 7 March 2025 in Geneva.

The depositary duly noted the various reactions to the final draft text of the declaration, as communicated by several High Contracting Parties since 27 February 2025. It made efforts to find compromise solutions. However, based on the broad consultations conducted, the depositary concluded that the draft declaration of 27 February 2025 remained the text most likely to garner the support of a cross-regional critical mass of High Contracting Parties. Taking into account feedback from High Contracting Parties since 27 February 2025, the depositary issued another notification to all High Contracting Parties on 5 March 2025. In this communication, the depositary reaffirmed its understanding that the draft declaration circulated on 27 February 2025 remained the version most likely to secure the required cross-regional support. The depositary further extended the deadline for registration to the Conference until 4 p.m. (Greenwich Mean Time +1) on 6 March 2025.

Furthermore, the depositary emphasized that, should a cross-regional critical mass of registered High Contracting Parties not be reached by the extended deadline, it would conclude that the necessary willingness to hold the Conference was lacking. Consequently, the Conference would not take place.

In a final notification dated 6 March 2025, the depositary informed the High Contracting Parties that it had not received registration from a cross-regional critical mass of High Contracting Parties within the deadline. As a consequence, the Conference was not held and no final declaration was adopted.

4. Conclusion of the mandate

The depositary made every possible effort to hold a Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention in accordance with paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution [ES-10/24](#). However, based on the registrations received from High Contracting Parties, a cross-regional critical mass in favour of holding the Conference was not achieved. This concludes the depositary's actions in relation to the invitation contained in the aforementioned paragraph.
