

**Proposals on a political declaration to ensure the protection of civilians from humanitarian harm that can arise from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**

We recognize the value of a political declaration aiming at addressing the humanitarian harm that can arise from the use of explosive weapons in urban contexts and we assess that this political declaration must be:

- i. **Accurate.** Much of the harm and destruction observed in current conflicts appears to be the result of violations of IHL provisions including, but not limited to, the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The political declaration should affirm that the core challenge is to improve the implementation of IHL principles by promoting appropriate policies and practices for the conduct of military operations in urban contexts, but should not as an effect stigmatize IHL compliant uses of explosive weapons. It must also condemn the tactics used by some parties to conflicts designed to exploit the proximity of civilians and civilian objects to military objectives in populated areas ;
- ii. **Unequivocal.** With this political declaration, we must underline the need for all parties to armed conflicts, including non-state actors, to strictly abide by IHL fundamental rules and principles which would, if universally respected, efficiently minimise civilian loss, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects caused by urban warfare. We must also reaffirm our determination to hold accountable those responsible for violations of international law ;
- iii. **Realistic and efficient.** Introducing inappropriate or impracticable restrictions on lawful use of military capabilities would not address the core challenge and would leave excessive room for non IHL-compliant actors to continue their abuse of civilians as human shields and of populated areas as safe havens. Thus, States within this political declaration, must commit to enforce and, where necessary, to adopt and strengthen national policies and effective practices designed to minimize civilian harms when conducting military operations in urban environment, in particular when using explosive weapons in populated areas ;
- iv. **Proactive.** The political declaration must encourage cooperation among States and among their armed forces with respect to the identification, development and exchange of good practices to continuously enhance the protection of civilians and civilian objects in urban warfare.

*The comments provided above summarise the common position of our collective States but are in addition to and do not prejudice material provided by individual States in a separate manner.*

Endorsed by: Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, United Kingdom