

Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare
Towards a Political Declaration to Address the Humanitarian Harm Arising from the Use of
Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas
Geneva Consultations
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Statement on behalf of United Nations and other organizations
engaged in humanitarian action*

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of 21 United Nations and other organizations engaged in humanitarian action.

As field-based humanitarian and human rights organizations, protecting and assisting millions of people in the world's conflict zones, we are acutely aware of the catastrophic humanitarian impact that results from urban warfare and, in particular, the widespread use of explosive weapons in towns, cities and other populated areas.

We therefore welcome the attention given to this issue at the Vienna conference last month and the convening by Ireland of today's consultation to begin work on a political declaration to address the devastating humanitarian impact resulting from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, as recommended by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Such a declaration should recognize the grave humanitarian and human rights consequences that arise from using explosive weapons in populated areas. This includes the direct effects, such as civilian deaths and injury and destruction of civilian objects; and also the longer-term, "reverberating effects", such as the disruption of essential services, displacement, loss of access to housing, healthcare, education and livelihoods, and the persistent threat of explosive remnants of war.

A declaration should also contain commitments that will make a meaningful difference to the lives of conflict-affected populations and that will provide clear political and practical direction and ensure effective implementation of international humanitarian law.

In particular, a declaration should include an express commitment to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and to develop operational policies based on a presumption against such use, as recommended by the United Nations Secretary-General.

It should, moreover, commit States to:

- Review and adapt their military policy and practice, including doctrine, training and equipment, so as to better prepare their armed forces for urban warfare.
- Identify, develop and exchange "good practices" in relation to weapon-target matching, targeting procedures, planning and training, as well as civilian casualty tracking, battle damage assessments and lessons learned, exports of heavy explosive weapons and support to parties to armed conflict, to mitigate civilian harm.
- Develop mechanisms and tools to strengthen the collection of data on the types of weapons used in populated areas and their effects, both direct and indirect, on civilians (disaggregated by age and sex).

- To take all appropriate measures to provide victims of explosive weapons in populated areas with adequate assistance, including in the form of physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support and socio-economic reintegration; and to support and facilitate clearance of explosive remnants of war.

A political declaration that contains these various elements would make a significant and lasting impact in addressing and preventing harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

*Endorsed by:

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

CARE

Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)

Heartland Alliance International

Humanity and Inclusion (HI)

InterAction

International Rescue Committee (IRC)

INTERSOS

Mercy Corps

Mines Advisory Group (MAG)

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Oxfam

Premiere Urgence Internationale

Save the Children

Secours Islamique France