



POLITICAL DECLARATION ON THE USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

SUMMARY

By making changes to military policies and practices, and by taking steps to redress harm caused by explosive weapons in populated areas, the level of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure during urban conflict would be significantly reduced and many lives would be saved, both during and after conflict.

MEDIA BRIEF

WHY IS THE POLITICAL DECLARATION IMPORTANT?

- In recent years, wars have become increasingly fought in areas with high concentrations of civilians, but often with **weapon systems that were originally designed for use in open battlefields**, such as weapons with large blast radius, multiple warheads or inaccuracy of delivery.
- When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, **9 in 10 casualties are civilians, with children disproportionately affected**.
- The use of these weapons in populated areas also causes **severe damage to critical civilian infrastructures** such as schools, hospitals, power plants, or water and sanitation systems leading to **significant disruption in the provision of essential services and creating a pattern of long-term harm**.
- The use of these weapons in populated areas often leads to **displacement** as civilians seek refuge elsewhere, while contamination in the form of unexploded ordnance prevents people from returning safely once the conflict has ended. People living in cities and other populated areas where such weapons have been or are still being used will be **living with the impact of explosive weapons for generations to come**. The cost of making these places safe will run into billions of dollars.
- Now, more than ever, there is a **clear need for further action to strengthen the protection of civilians in conflict**.

WHAT DOES THE POLITICAL DECLARATION PROPOSE?

- In 2019, Ireland proposed a new Political Declaration to address the devastating and long-lasting humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- In June 2022, the Declaration was finalised after almost three years of international negotiations.
- While the Declaration is not legally binding, it does commit states to strengthen the protection of civilians in conflict by:
 - **Imposing limits** on the use of explosive weapons in towns, cities and other populated areas in order to avoid civilian harm.
 - **Developing and fully implementing national policies** to ensure compliance of obligations under International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.
 - **Strengthening international cooperation between armed forces**, including sharing and promoting best practices and policies.
 - **Increasing and improving public sharing of data** regarding the tracking and recording of civilian casualties as a result of explosive weapons in urban areas.
 - **Amplifying the voices of affected communities**, including women and girls, to ensure their needs are heard and understood.
 - Read the Declaration in full here.

IS THERE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THIS POLITICAL DECLARATION?

- The accumulation of evidence of systematic and predictable humanitarian harm has resulted in **an emerging consensus that political action is urgently needed**, with over 100 states, several multilateral organisations, military actors, the Red Cross and consecutive UN Secretary-Generals and other high-level UN officials also signalling their support for action over the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- Many states – including the UK - have announced their intention to sign the Declaration. We continue to urge all other states to join and commit to signing it.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- A signing ceremony hosted by the Irish Government will take place in Dublin on 18th November 2022, during which states will have the opportunity to **officially sign the Declaration and take steps towards stronger action** to reduce humanitarian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The Declaration will remain open for signature and states that do not sign it in Dublin will still be able to endorse it afterwards
- The endorsement of the Declaration would be **a major step forward in stigmatising the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**, with those states that join committing to work together to set new standards.

“As an organisation, we have witnessed first-hand the destruction resulting from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and the long-term devastating impact it has on communities. We are pleased that a Political Declaration has been agreed on, after years of advocacy and diplomacy. As we move towards the signing ceremony, it is imperative that this Declaration goes beyond a mere written commitment but translates into concrete action on the ground that will protect and positively impact affected communities. There is no doubt that this Declaration, if fully implemented, could save countless lives.”

Darren Cormack, CEO of the Mines Advisory Group



More information:

- [Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas - Mines Advisory Group](#)
- [Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland](#)
- [Political Response, INEW](#)
- [The Explosive Weapons Monitor](#)

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