

Protecting civilians against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA)

Dublin Conference – 18 November 2022

Parliamentary call to action

A century ago, civilians represented 15% of total casualties in armed conflicts¹. Half a century later, this had risen to nearly 50%. Over the past few years, civilians accounted for 90% of victims when explosive weapons were used in populated areas.

Conflicts are becoming more complex and urbanized. Airstrikes, artillery shells, rocket launchers: the bombing and shelling of cities in wartime has become the norm rather than the exception. When they are used in the heart of cities, explosive weapons injure, kill, destroy infrastructure and human lives without distinction. The scale of these tragedies is endless: beyond the loss of human life, the destruction causes massive displacements and leads to psychological damage, water and electricity cuts, school closures and lack of access to healthcare.

Mariupol in Ukraine, Mosul in Iraq, Aleppo in Syria, Sana'a in Yemen, Dessie in Ethiopia. Many contemporary armed conflicts leave entire neighborhoods in ruins. Around the points of impact, populations and infrastructure cannot withstand the shock. The city has replaced open battlefields, becoming the epicenter of wars, bringing with it hundreds of thousands of civilian victims. The domino effects are devastating and remain palpable in the daily lives of families, for years and sometimes decades, after attacks.

In the face of civilian harm and suffering, including potential violations of international humanitarian law, it is imperative to act. We welcome the adoption of the international political declaration by states at the Dublin conference on November 18, 2022. We call on all our States to endorse this historic text, and without delay, work towards its universalization and effective implementation.

By endorsing, States commit to implement national policies to restrict and refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas. They recognize the extensive nature of the damage caused by their use and the reverberating effects on civilian infrastructure and at the same time commit to sharing data on the direct and indirect consequences of these weapons. Finally, States commit to assisting victims and communities, facilitating humanitarian access and working towards humanitarian mine action in affected areas.

Throughout this process, we, parliamentarians from different countries and backgrounds, have a crucial role to play. As legislators, our role is central to the implementation of international agreements at the national level. In several of our countries, an active parliamentary process took place over several years, with the support of civil society, to call on our governments to urgently address this critical issue.

The implementation of this agreement must now be as rapid, concrete and effective as possible. Convinced of the historic and universal significance of this text, we wish to play our full part in its follow-up. For this reason, we are committed to implementing the following 9 concrete actions:

¹ <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12709.pdf>

1. Sign the International Parliamentary Appeal of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW). This appeal summarizes, as does this text, our unwavering commitment to work for better protection of civilians against bombing and shelling in populated areas.
2. Encourage the development of national policy and practice with regard to the protection of civilians and the use explosive weapons in populated areas. This includes military policies, as well as policies on victim assistance and support to conflict affected communities, as well as the establishment of mechanisms to collect and share data on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and the direct and indirect effects.
3. Create a "group of friends of the EWIPA political declaration" within our respective parliaments. Study and Friendship Groups should be one of the main vehicles for regular dialogue with diplomatic and military actors, but also with international and local NGOs and any civil society actor working on the subject. These are institutional platforms that should allow, within each parliament, in-depth work on the subject, a demanding dialogue and a permanent mobilization.
4. Work towards inter-parliamentary collaboration and dialogue on the follow-up to the political declaration. Bodies such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) as well as any other space for consultation and shared work among parliamentarians from several countries should be platforms for joint mobilization on these issues. We will particularly encourage synergies and the exchange of good practices among parliamentarians working on other disarmament and protection of civilians' issues.
5. Initiate public hearings in the foreign affairs and defense committees. These hearings contribute to the essential effort of transparency of governments towards their parliamentarians, who monitor the respect of the international commitments of governments, notably on defense, diplomacy, respect of the law and humanitarian action.
6. Work to pass a parliamentary resolution² on EWIPA. The resolution, which can also be a motion, is not legally binding. However, its symbolic significance gives it a certain political weight: that of a Parliament that affirms its common and transparent will to work towards the success of such an agreement.
7. To ask questions, both written and oral, in public session and in committee, to the government and to the ministers. This tool remains an effective regular monitoring tool, which will contribute to the greater transparency of government action in their follow-up and implementation of the political declaration.
8. Act as media and public ambassadors or spokespersons, working with journalists or using our social networks to contribute to the greater visibility of various humanitarian tragedies and the impact of the political statement, including by working with people with lived experience, visiting affected communities, in coordination with humanitarian actors.
9. Work in our constituencies to raise public awareness of these issues. Through public meetings, we have a role to play in the effort to educate, at the local level, about the relevance and impact of the EWIPA political declaration.

² On May 6, 2021, the Federal Parliament in Belgium became the first in the world to pass [a resolution](https://www.lachambre.be/FLWB/PDF/55/1222/55K1222005.pdf) that asks its government to commit to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas: <https://www.lachambre.be/FLWB/PDF/55/1222/55K1222005.pdf>