



BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR MEDIA

States to adopt new international Declaration to protect civilians from use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Dublin, Ireland on 18 November 2022

- A new international *Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* opens for states to endorse it at a conference in Dublin on 18 November 2022.
- The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is the leading cause of civilian casualties in contemporary armed conflicts, and the Declaration is the first formal international recognition that this must be addressed urgently and directly.
- INEW calls on all states to endorse the Declaration which aims to reduce civilian harm and strengthen the protection of civilians, by imposing limits on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and by assisting victims and affected communities during and after conflict.
- On the eve of the Adoption Conference, activists and survivors of armed conflict gather at Global Civil Society Forum in Dublin after a decade-long campaign for this new international agreement which will now be signed onto and implemented by states.

Follow INEW on @explosiveweapon and #StopBombingCivilians. For media enquiries contact Samantha Bolton, +41 79 239 23 66, samanthabolton@gmail.com

Questions and Answers

What is the International Network on Explosive Weapons – INEW?

- The International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) is an NGO partnership calling for immediate action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It comprises more than 40 organisations from across 25 countries. The steering committee is comprised of Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), Article 36, Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), Humanity and Inclusion (HI), Human Rights Watch, PAX, Norwegian People's Aid, Oxfam, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Save the Children and SEHLAC.
www.inew.org | @explosiveweapon

What is the Dublin Adoption Conference taking place at Dublin Castle in Dublin, Ireland, on 18 November 2022?

- A new international *Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* opens for states to endorse at a conference in Dublin on 18 November 2022.
(See full text: "Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas" at www.dfa.ie/EWIPA)
- Minister Simon Coveney, T.D. Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, will open the meeting, with other high-level representatives from the International Committee of the

Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations, the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), and survivor of armed conflict and activist, Nujeen Mustafa.

- The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is the leading cause of civilian casualties in contemporary armed conflicts. The Declaration is the first formal international recognition that this must be addressed urgently and directly.
- INEW calls on all states to endorse the Declaration to reduce civilian harm and strengthen the protection of civilians, by imposing limits on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and by assisting victims and affected communities during and after conflict.
- The Declaration was finalised by states on 17 June 2022 at the United Nations in Geneva. It is the culmination of almost three years of diplomatic negotiations led by Ireland, involving States, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil-society organisations, including the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).
- INEW and its Irish partner Dóchas will host a Civil Society Forum event prior to the Signing Conference on the afternoon of 17 November. This event will bring together states, international organisations and civil society ahead of the conference to ensure that the adoption of the political declaration is just the beginning of a long-term, committed and effective process of work.

Which states support the political declaration?

- Around 60-70 states are expected to endorse the Declaration at the Dublin Conference, including some major users of explosive weapons as well as affected countries.

Which international and civil society organisations are working on this issue?

- The United Nations Secretary-General and United Nations humanitarian agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society organisations like the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), have for more than a decade, been calling for immediate action to address harm to civilians from bombing and shelling in towns and cities.
- Successive UN Secretary-Generals have called on parties to armed conflicts to refrain from using explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.
- The ICRC has long urged states and parties in armed conflicts to avoid using explosive weapons with wide area effects in densely populated areas, due to the high risk of indiscriminate effects and harm to civilians.
- At the end of 2015, in an [unprecedented joint appeal](#) on the impact of ongoing conflicts on civilians, the UN Secretary-General and the President of the ICRC called on parties to armed conflict, to stop the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas. [Repeated in 2019](#), this call warned of civilian devastation and suffering.

What difference will the political declaration make?

- The political declaration is the first formal international recognition that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences which must be urgently addressed. It also recognises that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas poses unacceptable risks to civilians, particularly when the weapons have wide area effects.
- The declaration promotes stronger standards to protect civilians and commits states which endorse it, to make the necessary changes to their national policy and practice, including military policies and operational rules of engagement.
- The declaration should be seen as a starting point—not an end point. A key area will be changing military practice away from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Much more needs to be done to better protect civilians and to build stronger standards to drive forward significant change. This takes time.

What will the new political agreement require states to do?

- States that endorse the political declaration commit to work together, with the UN, ICRC and civil society, to strengthen the protection of civilians from explosive weapons. This requires action in a number of key areas, including:
 - Commitment to impose limits on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to avoid civilian harm – the centrepiece of the declaration.
 - Commitment to address both the short- and long-term affects, resulting from the damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure.
 - Provision to assist victims, including: people injured, families of those killed and injured; and conflict-affected communities.
 - Requirement for states to collect and share data on civilian harm from explosive weapon use.
 - Follow up meetings to review how the Declaration is being implemented and to share examples of military policy and practice, to protect civilians from explosive weapon use.
- The declaration is a practical tool which sets an agenda for changes to military policy and practice, including, essential changes in the planning and conduct of military operations, as well as humanitarian measures to assist survivors, family members of those injured and killed in affected communities. It also commits states to address the long-term affect of the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Why strengthen the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas?

- As the world urbanises, so does conflict. As a result, high numbers of civilians are confronted on a daily basis with bombing and shelling where they live and work. How wars are fought has also changed: fighting and bombing often takes place in busy populated centres, with weapons designed for use in open battlefields.
- A century ago, civilians represented approximately 10–15% of total casualties in armed conflict. By the World War II, this had risen to nearly 50%, and by the 1990s civilians accounted for 80- 85% of casualties in armed conflict, a rising trend which continued, if not intensified, into the twenty-first century (*Kaldor, 2013, cited in ODI*).
- Today, when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 90% of victims are civilians - a trend consistently documented for over a decade ([AOAV](#)).
- Explosive weapons in populated areas poses one of the greatest threats to civilians in contemporary armed conflicts. The [UN Secretary-General described the use of explosive weapons in populated areas](#) as the “primary killer of civilians in conflict.
- Every year tens of thousands of civilians are killed and injured by bombing and shelling in towns, cities and other populated areas. In the last decade, more than 511,000 civilians were reportedly directly killed and / or injured by the use of explosive weapons, according to [AOAV](#), the majority in populated areas.
- Beyond the risk of death and injury for civilians, the use of explosive weapons systems in populated areas destroys critical civilian infrastructure such as housing, hospitals and schools, as well as power, water and sanitation systems, which damage the supply of essential services to civilians. Attacks and the loss of housing and essential services - combined with leftover contamination from unexploded ordnance - triggers many civilians to flee or leave their homes (see more [ICRC](#)).

Which countries are most affected?

- The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a widespread problem and pattern of harm experienced in a wide range of countries and contexts. Over the past decade, incidents involving civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons has been documented in 130 countries, (AOAV).
- Some of the most affected countries include Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Ukraine, Nigeria, Somalia, Palestine (Gaza), and Libya.

What are some examples of use?

- In **Ethiopia**:
 - Civilian harm from airstrikes by Ethiopian military forces killed and injured at least 677 people from November 2021 through March 2022, with more civilian casualties reported in recent months ([UNHCR](#)).
 - One such strike, in which an armed drone reportedly dropped three bombs, hit a school compound hosting thousands of displaced Tigrayans, killing at least 57 civilians and wounding more than 42 ([Human Rights Watch](#)).
- In **Gaza**:
 - At least 6,700 civilian casualties were recorded by [AOAV](#) over the last decade.
 - Military actions by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during its bombardment of Gaza in May 2021 killed at least 151 civilians, a third of whom were children ([Airwars](#)).
 - At this time, Israel conducted more than 1,500 air and artillery strikes, mostly within densely populated areas of Gaza, destroying critical civilian infrastructure, including four high-rise buildings, neighboring residences and scores of businesses in Gaza City ([Airwars](#), [Human Rights Watch](#)).
- In **Syria**:
 - Over 80,600 civilians casualties resulting from the use of explosive weapons were recorded by [AOAV](#) over the last decade.
 - The Syrian-Russian military alliance conducted aerial bombing of critical civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and markets, exacerbating civilian harm where 12.4 million people are already food insecure and 6.8 million are now internally displaced ([Human Rights Watch](#), [UN World Food Programme](#)).
 - The Russian air force alone carried out around 39,000 airstrikes in Syria since 2015, and ongoing attacks continue to put civilians in danger ([Airwars](#)).
- In **Ukraine**:
 - At least 11,600 civilian casualties were recorded by [AOAV](#) over the last decade.
 - Armed conflict in Ukraine – with regular reports of artillery shelling is over the past eight years – has been deadly for civilians, who account for 89% of casualties caused by explosive weapons ([AOAV](#)).
 - In the current conflict, extensive use of multi-barrel rocket systems, unguided missiles and air-dropped bombs by Russian forces in major towns and cities including Kyiv, Mariupol, and Kharkiv continues to kill and injure civilians; to damage and destroy homes and infrastructure, and to force millions of people to flee for safety ([INEW](#)).
 - Nearly 7 million people are still displaced inside the country, trapped and unable to leave ([Center for Strategic and International Studies](#)).
- In **Yemen**:
 - Over 18,300 civilian casualties result from the use of explosive weapons, recorded by [AOAV](#) over the last decade.
 - In early 2022, Yemen experienced a sustained period of heavy bombing by the Saudi-led coalition, when civilians experienced at least 200 air raids per month ([Yemen Data Project](#)).

- o Extensive bombing worsened a humanitarian crisis, which displaced over four million people and left 17.4 million hungry ([Oxfam](#)).
- o Due to prolonged conflict, it is estimated that only 51% of health facilities continue to function and an estimated 20.1 million people lack access to basic healthcare ([ICRC](#)).

What are explosive weapons?

- Explosive weapons are conventional weapons that detonate explosives to affect an area with blast and fragmentation. They come in a wide range of types and sizes.
- There are many types of explosive weapons, including mortar bombs, artillery shells, rockets, and aircraft bombs. These weapons explode – killing and injuring people, or damaging vehicles and buildings, through the blast and fragmentation that an explosion creates around the point of detonation.
- Many explosive weapon systems were designed for use in open battlefields and have devastating consequences when used in populated areas with concentrations of civilians and infrastructure essential to their survival.
- Particular concerns are focused on explosive weapons with wide area effects, which, due to their scale of explosive force have a wide blast and fragmentation radius, or are inaccurate, or deliver multiple munitions across a targeted area, or have a combination of these characteristics – causing widespread damage and as such are inappropriate choices for use in towns and cities.
- Different types of explosive weapons may be delivered in different ways (some are fired from the ground, others are dropped from the air), and they may vary in the scale of effects that they create, but they share the tendency to affect an area with blast and fragmentation. They come in a wide range of types and sizes, and include:
 - o **Airdropped bombs** – Certain airdropped bombs have a very high explosive yield that can create a powerful blast effect, which can lead to the collapse of entire buildings. Because of this power they may, in certain situations, create blast and fragmentation effects beyond the intended target even if they land in the intended place. Unguided gravity bombs, dropped from an aircraft, can be difficult to place accurately on a target. As such, an aircraft may release multiple bombs in what is called a 'stick'. This extends the area effects of these weapons still further.
 - o **Multi-barrel rocket launcher** – This system can launch up to 40 rockets in 20 seconds, producing multiple warhead detonations across a very wide area. Rockets are sometimes fired in groups or 'salvos', creating additional inaccuracy and significantly increasing the area effects that will be created. Multi-barrel rocket launchers are designed to fire salvos of rockets over long distances.
 - o **Mortars** – Mortars are typically used as indirect fire weapons. They fire projectiles from a launch tube into the air that then impact at a location that might be several kilometres away. For some common types at a distance of 7km, the chance of a projectile landing within 100m from the target might only be just over 50%. Because of their inaccuracy, mortars will sometimes be used in 'mass fires', with multiple mortars firing shells from separate firing section locations to enhance the chance of striking the intended target, thereby extending the area effect.
 - o **Artillery** - Firing of artillery rounds, or 'shells', is highly inaccurate. A number of artillery guns (a 'battery') is typically used to deliver multiple rounds at a target. Because of uncertainty of individual firings, multiple firings might be necessary to

have confidence of affecting the intended target. As multiple firings slightly change the gun's temperature and placement this can further extend the area effects. A single howitzer shell has a lethal radius of around 50 metres. Blast and fragmentation effects extend even further, causing damage and injury. A common M795 155mm high explosive howitzer shell will generally have a lethal radius of 50m, with fragmentation spreading significantly further.

Who uses explosive weapons?

- Explosive weapons are used both by state forces and non-state armed groups. Professionally trained militaries are among those causing this harm. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have been responsible for high levels of civilian harm and are often associated with non-state violence.

What is the legal position of this use?

- Direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects are illegal under the laws of armed conflict, but using explosive weapons in armed conflict is not illegal per se. The primary concern is use of heavy explosive weapons that, because of their wide area effects, which cause significant civilian harm if used in a populated area – even if directed at an intended military target.
- The laws of armed conflict represent the minimum standards of behaviour even in the most desperate circumstances. Data and evidence shows that more needs to be done to address the specific problem of explosive weapons in populated areas and that there have been situations where militaries have limited the use of certain explosive weapons in certain situations in order to better protect civilians.
- The political declaration builds on states' existing obligations under the laws of armed conflict. It recognises that national policies and practices can go beyond these minimum standards and commits states to develop operational policies and practices that impose limitations and restrictions on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.