



**Statement by the International Network on Explosive Weapons
United Nations General Assembly First Committee – Disarmament and International Security**

**New York
11 October 2023**

Delivered by Katherine Young, International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)

Thank you, Chair,

I am pleased to address the First Committee today on behalf of INEW – the International Network on Explosive Weapons – a coalition of civil society organizations working to prevent the human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

In towns and cities across the world – including Ukraine, Sudan, and once again Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories – civilians experience the terror of armed conflict through the sounds of explosions, the fear of bombardment from bombs dropped by fighter jets, and the shockwaves felt from artillery fired in the streets outside their homes.

Nujeen Mustafa, a survivor activist who fled Aleppo, Syria, can sometimes still hear the roar of explosions that shook the walls of her apartment. In her wheelchair, she was pushed, pulled and carried across eight country borders to Germany when it became clear that the bombing, which continues today, would not stop.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a leading cause of harm to civilians in armed conflict. In addition to causing psychological suffering, the bombing and shelling of towns and cities kills and injures tens of thousands of civilians each year, with children particularly vulnerable. It destroys critical civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and power and water systems, which impacts the provision of essential services and leads to long-term civilian suffering.

While these impacts on civilians are devastating, they are also foreseeable. Most importantly, they are preventable.

On 18 November 2022, 83 states endorsed the *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences of the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* – the first formal international recognition that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences that must be urgently addressed. The culmination of almost three years of consultations, it aims to limit the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and to address their immediate and longer-term impacts.

By endorsing the Declaration, states both recognize the harms experienced by civilians as a result of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and commit to work to prevent and address these harms together with the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society.

Implementation of the Declaration by all endorsing states will entail action in a number of key areas, including:

- Developing national policy and practice to restrict or refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

- Developing national policy and practice to protect civilians from the foreseeable direct and indirect effects of military operations.
- Establishing capacities to gather and share data to better understand the humanitarian consequences of military operations.
- Assisting victims, their families and affected communities, and facilitating humanitarian access to civilians in need.

The Declaration sets an expectation that endorsing states will implement their commitments in good faith and in accordance with the humanitarian goals of the instrument. States should expeditiously begin that process ahead of the Oslo Conference next year and come ready to report on progress that has been made. This should include reviewing existing policies and practices relevant to the protection of civilians and engaging in dialogue with key partners, including civil society.

However confident endorsing states are in their existing efforts to protect civilians in their military operations, there should be an expectation that all states upon joining the Declaration can, and should, make improvements to their national policies and practice.

In summary, INEW calls on all states to:

- Continue to publicly call for action to address the full scope of harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- Endorse the recommendation of the UN Secretary-General and the ICRC that parties to conflict should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.
- Endorse the Declaration or encourage endorsement by others in order to promote its adoption and implementation by the greatest number of states.
- Start to assess the steps required at the national level to implement the Declaration's commitments, including in the areas of military policy and practice, victim assistance, and data collection.

INEW stands ready to support these efforts.

Thank you.