

## **Meeting on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, organised by Germany and the ICRC**

30 August 2017, Geneva

### **INEW statement**

Thank you Chair.

On behalf of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), I would like to share our perspective on action required to develop an effective response to the widespread humanitarian harm that results from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

First of all, we would like to thank the organisers of this meeting, and all of the presenters. We think every opportunity should be taken to build recognition of the harm from EWIPA and discuss how we can best respond.

INEW is an international network of civil society organisations calling for immediate action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We call on states and other actors to recognise the pattern of harm to individuals and communities, to strive to avoid such harm by reviewing and strengthening national policies and practices, including through gathering data, to work for the full realisation of the rights of victims and survivors, and to develop stronger international standards – including prohibitions and restrictions on the use of certain explosive weapons in populated areas.

Each year tens of thousands of people are killed and injured by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, with the highest rates in recent years experienced in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Turkey. Research carried out by INEW member Action on Armed Violence shows that when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 92% of the victims are civilian. Beyond the direct deaths and injuries, this practice causes severe and long-lasting damage to housing and essential infrastructure including medical facilities, schools, and water and sanitation systems. It drives people from their homes, and it often prevents their return.

For eight years, UN Secretary-Generals have expressed concern over the protection of civilians in conflict, identifying the use of EWIPA as a significant cause of concern in this regard. Around 70 states have now also recognised EWIPA as a key humanitarian issue of concern. Increasingly calls have been made by states, the UN Secretary-General, and the ICRC to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.

Explosive weapons with wide area effects are of particular concern. As we heard from the GICHD, these include, among others, large aircraft bombs, indirect fire mortars, and multiple launch rocket systems. In our view, these are entirely inappropriate weapons for use in towns and cities where there are high numbers of civilians put at risk of death and injury, and civilian infrastructure at risk of destruction, which can hamper entire communities for generations.

INEW has been working with Austria and other interested states on the development of an international political declaration on explosive weapons. We see a political declaration as a tool that can provide an effective response to such harm. It can achieve this through clear and ambitious commitments requiring action by states, the centrepiece of which should be designed to stop the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.

Already in many military policies and procedures the area effects of explosive weapons are recognised as a key determinate of risk to civilians. We have seen examples of militaries developing operational responses to constrain the use of certain explosive weapons in

populated areas to provide greater protection to civilians. A declaration would set an international standard against the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas, provide a framework for states to develop national measures, and a forum to discuss how these are best achieved and to review effectiveness. A declaration can also require other measures to assist and protect communities from the use of EWIPA.

Whilst we welcome this informal discussion today, INEW does not believe that the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) is the best forum to provide a meaningful response to this issue of urgent humanitarian concern. The CCW, working under its consensus-based decision making, has already demonstrated that some States Parties will not recognise the distinct pattern of harm that results from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Without being able to recognise the problem, we think that there is little hope to effectively respond to it.

A political declaration with a focus on stopping the use in populated areas of those explosive weapons that cause the greatest harm to civilians – those with wide area effects – would have a significant humanitarian impact. The development of this type of international commitment would be best led by a partnership of states and organisations, committed to developing a tool that will reduce the humanitarian suffering.

INEW is committed to working with all states, organisations, and other actors that share our concerns over the harm from EWIPA and are committed to action. Tomorrow we will hold our largest campaign conference on this issue and plan our work ahead.

Thank you.