



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

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Delivered by Bethany Ellis, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

Thank you, Chair,

It is my pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of INEW – the International Network on Explosive Weapons – a global network of civil society organizations that calls for strengthened action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

In conflicts across the globe from Gaza and Lebanon to Ukraine, from Myanmar to Sudan – the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a leading cause of harm to civilians in armed conflict. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, as much as 90 percent of victims are civilians. Civilians suffer complex and life changing injuries and long-term psychological distress from the trauma of living under bombing. Due to their physiology, stages of development, and dependence on caregivers, the impact on children is particularly acute.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas also destroys critical civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, water and sanitation facilities – impacting the provision of essential services to the civilian population, further compounding the situation. Children can face malnutrition, stunting, lose access to immunizations and to education with lasting consequences for their survival, development, and long-term health and livelihood.

Ongoing attacks involving explosive weapons constrain access by humanitarian organizations. The destruction of housing and loss of access to essential services, as well as the presence of explosive remnants of war, forces civilians to flee or leave their homes

towards an uncertain fate and exposes children to heightened risks of violations and abuses, including grave violations.

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 culmination of almost three years of consultations – the Declaration is the first formal international recognition that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences that must be urgently addressed. The number of endorsing States has now risen to 87.

By endorsing the Declaration, states commit to avoid civilian harm by restricting or refraining from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Endorser states are expected to act in good faith and implement their commitments. This should include reviewing existing policies and practices relevant to the protection of civilians, engaging in dialogue with key partners including civil society, and supporting and participating in interim activities.

From 22 to 24 April 2024, governments, international organisations and civil society met in Oslo, Norway for the first international follow-up conference to the Declaration. Whilst this was a welcome opportunity to review progress towards implementation, also highlighted that more states need to begin the process of reviewing, adapting and developing new policies and changing practice if this Declaration is to make a meaningful difference.

Furthermore in the current context where we are witnessing what one [senior UN official as described as “no end to hell” in northern Gaza](#), let alone other contexts where people are suffering immensely, far more must be done by endorsing states to call on parties to stop the bombardment of cities, towns and other populated areas.

INEW calls on States to:

- Continue to publicly acknowledge and call for action to address the severe harm to individuals and communities from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, both direct and indirect.
- Endorse - if not already the case - the *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* and implement its commitments, including in the areas of military policy and practice, victim assistance, humanitarian access, and data collection.

- Encourage other States to endorse the Declaration in order to promote its adoption and implementation by the greatest number of states. This includes convening or participating in discussions at the regional/sub-regional level.
- Use diplomatic means and influence to:
 - Call on parties to conflict to stop the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas;
 - Call on parties to conflict to take into account both the direct and indirect effects on civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including child-specific risks;
 - Call on parties to conflict to facilitate rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to those in need;
 - Call on parties to conflict to provide, facilitate, or support assistance to victims—which includes people injured, survivors, families of people killed or injured, as well as communities affected by the armed conflict; and
 - Call on parties to conflict to facilitate the work of the United Nations, the ICRC, and civil society organisations aimed at protecting and assisting civilian populations from the humanitarian impacts of explosive weapon use.

We have an opportunity over the next few months to make progress on this issue, and come together again in Costa Rica for the second follow-up conference which is scheduled to take place in July 2025.

I thank you.