



## Protecting children from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas August 2014

The International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)<sup>1</sup> calls on states to use the opportunity provided by the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Children in Armed Conflict in September 2014 to address the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas. INEW encourages states to use the debate to:

- Acknowledge the severe impact on children from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas;
- Call for the collection of data on the impact of explosive weapons on children; and for information on national and multilateral policies regarding use of explosive weapons;
- Call for monitoring and reporting where explosive weapons cause a pattern of killing and maiming of children, and for establishment of national action plans to address this; and,
- Call for an international commitment to prevent the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.

### An urgent humanitarian issue

Save the Children has stated that: “In addition to killing and injuring children, use of explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas, results in children being denied access to healthcare and the opportunity to go to school. It can also prevent life-saving humanitarian aid from reaching children, causing them to be displaced from their homes, exposing them to the risk of separation from their families and communities, and increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.”<sup>2</sup> In 2012 the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict urged states to refrain from using explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and noted it again in her 2013 report to the UNGA.<sup>3</sup>

Children continue to bear the brunt of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The UN [reported on 7 August](#) that 429 children had been killed “as a result of airstrikes and shelling” in Gaza.<sup>4</sup> In 2013, Oxford Research Group reported that 71% of child casualties during the Syrian conflict were from the explosive weapons.<sup>5</sup> In these conflicts, a particular cause for concern has been explosive weapons with wide area effects, such as multiple barrel rocket launchers and heavy artillery. Research by Action on Armed Violence indicates a clear pattern of harm to children from explosive weapons use.<sup>6</sup>

### An opportunity for new standards

Recognition of the distinct problems associated with explosive weapons has grown strongly over recent years. The 2012 and 2013 UN Secretary-General’s Reports on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict urged parties “to refrain from the use in populated areas of explosive weapons with a wide-area effect” and called on states to address this issue.<sup>7</sup> In 2011, the ICRC stated that, “due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects and despite the absence of an express legal prohibition for specific types of weapons, the ICRC considers that explosive weapons with a wide impact area should be avoided in densely populated areas.”<sup>8</sup>

Around 40 countries and territories have already expressed concern about the impact of explosive weapons.<sup>9</sup> Meetings in London and Oslo in September 2013 and June 2014 have furthered understanding of practices that states have adopted to prevent the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Building on this, the September 2014 Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict presents another opportunity for states to express their support for concrete steps that will help to prevent the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and to provide stronger protection to children in the future.

<sup>1</sup> INEW is a network of NGOs established in 2011 by Action on Armed Violence, Handicap International, Human Rights Watch, PAX, Medact, Norwegian People’s Aid, Oxfam and Save the Children.

<sup>2</sup> [Explosive weapons and grave violations against children](#), Save the Children, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Report by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, September 2012, A/68/257

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF press release, 7 August 2014: “[Reality of Gaza destruction haunts families and children amid ceasefire.](#)”

<sup>5</sup> Oxford Research Group, “Stolen Futures: the hidden toll of child casualties in Syria”, November 2013

<sup>6</sup> Action on Armed Violence: “[How explosive weapons continue to impact thousands of children’s lives.](#)” March 2013.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, “Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict,” UN Security Council, S/2013/689, 22 November 2013, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/689](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/689)

<sup>8</sup> ICRC, International Humanitarian Law and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts, October 2011, 31IC/11/5.1.2.

<sup>9</sup> Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Canada, Chile, Finland, Gabon, Germany, Guatemala, Holy See, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Montenegro, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, and the United States, as well as the Arab Group, the EU, the Nordic Countries, and the Human Security Network. See: [www.inew.org/acknowledgements](http://www.inew.org/acknowledgements).