
Explosive weapons in populated areas

International Network on Explosive Weapons

Background

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has been a key cause of harm to civilians in recent years, and one that requires urgent international attention. Over 33,000 civilians were reported killed or injured in 2015 by explosive weapons, according to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV). Where explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 92% of the casualties were civilian.

The bombing of towns and cities causes widespread civilian casualties, destroys vital infrastructure, and is a key driver of displacement. Conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere also provide clear illustrations of this persistent pattern of harm.

Reflecting the urgent nature of this humanitarian problem, the UN Secretary-General and the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross last year issued an unprecedented warning, calling on states to “stop the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas.”

Against this background, discussions are now starting towards developing a political instrument to address this humanitarian problem.

In 2011 a group of civil society organisations set up the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) to respond to the impact of the bombing

and bombardment of populated areas. So far around 70 states have publicly expressed concern about this humanitarian issue (see www.inew.org/ acknowledgements).

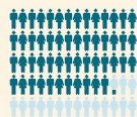
Recognition of this problem has steadily grown against the background of heavy casualties from the bombardment of populated areas in Côte d’Ivoire, Gaza, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, and elsewhere. The use of explosive weapons with wide area effects, such as rockets, heavy artillery, and large aircraft bombs, in populated areas has stood out as particularly harmful. In Syria and Iraq the use of so-called “barrel bombs” has attracted attention because of their wide-area effects. In addition, thousands of civilians have been killed and injured in towns and cities when improvised explosive devices, such as car bombs and “suicide” vests, have been detonated amongst crowds of people.

Current context

Since 2013, there has been a growing international discussion on how this humanitarian harm can be prevented.

At an international conference on the protection of civilians in Norway attended by 90 countries in May 2013, participants recommended that the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects should be avoided.

EXPLOSIVE VIOLENCE IN 2015



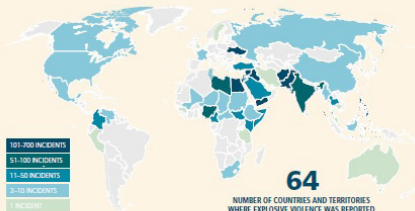
76%
CIVILIAN CASUALTIES
TOTAL REPORTED DEATHS & INJURIES: 43,786
TOTAL CIVILIAN DEATHS & INJURIES: 33,307



+2%
INCREASE IN TOTAL CIVILIAN
DEATHS & INJURIES



30
AVERAGE NUMBER OF CIVILIAN
DEATHS PER DAY



64

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES
WHERE EXPLOSIVE VIOLENCE WAS REPORTED



TARGETED AREAS

POPULATED AREAS

92% CIVILIAN DEATHS & INJURIES
IN POPULATED AREAS



1,236 ATTACKS IN POPULATED AREAS

NON-POPULATED AREAS

31% CIVILIAN DEATHS & INJURIES
IN NON-POPULATED AREAS



934 ATTACKS IN NON-POPULATED AREAS

LOCATION	TOTAL DEATHS & INJURIES	CIVILIAN DEATHS & INJURIES	AVERAGE CIVILIAN DEATHS & INJURIES PER ATTACK
URBAN RESIDENTIAL	5,400	93%	17
MARKETS	4,918	99%	42
PLACES OF WORSHIP	2,633	95%	44

DEADLY WEAPONS

AVERAGE CIVILIAN DEATHS & INJURIES PER INCIDENT BY EXPLOSIVE WEAPON TYPE

25



CAR BOMBS

42



AIR-DROPPED BOMBS

16



ROCKET ARTILLERY

CIVILIAN DEATHS & INJURIES BY WEAPON LAUNCH METHOD



49% IEDs (IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES)

21% GROUND-LAUNCHED

28% AIR-LAUNCHED

2% COMBINATIONS OR UNCLEAR

DATA: AOV, BASED ON ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA REPORTS

**AOAV WORKS TO REDUCE THE
WORLDWIDE HARM OF ARMED VIOLENCE**

**ACTION ON
ARMED VIOLENCE**

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The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has co-hosted two expert meetings with Chatham House in London (September 2013) and with Norway in Oslo (June 2014). These meetings have identified practices by armed forces that can be undertaken to reduce harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons.

In September 2015 the government of Austria and OCHA hosted a meeting for states that have recognised this problem and are interested in working together to address it. In particular Austria invited states to discuss how an international political

commitment could be developed in response to the predictable pattern of humanitarian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The issue was also raised as a key issue at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. A meeting in October 2016 in New York hosted by Austria with other states will consider options to improve the protection of civilians from such harm and in particular focus on identifying and discussing the possible elements of a political declaration. This meeting will take the Secretary-General's call for a political commitment, and other calls for action from

states, UN agencies, the ICRC, and civil society and launch a process to develop a political declaration to address harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Recommendations

During First Committee:

- Endorse the UN Secretary-General's recommendation that states should refrain from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas; and
- Indicate support for the development of an international political instrument to reduce harm from the use of explosive weapons, including stopping the use in populated areas of explosive weapons with wide-area effects.

Beyond First Committee:

- Review and make available national policies and practices related to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and make changes that will strengthen the protection of civilians;
- Support and make publicly available data-gathering on the use and impact of explosive weapons in populated areas, including age-, sex- and disability-disaggregated recording of casualties, and information on disabilities amongst survivors; and
- Recognise the rights of survivors, families of those killed or injured, and affected communities and respond to their short- and long-term needs.



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