



UN says bombing of towns and cities must stop New report calls for action against use of explosive weapons in populated areas

In his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict the UN Secretary-General has highlighted the civilian suffering caused by the bombing and bombardment of towns and cities. States must begin work now to set stronger international standards to protect civilians.

3 July 2015: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has once again identified the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as a key threat to the protection of civilians. In his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, released this week, he urged states to work on a commitment to “refrain from the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas”.ⁱ

In September, Austria will host a meeting in Vienna to commence discussions towards such a commitment, aimed at setting stronger international standards. The Secretary-General called on states to support this initiative. Since 2009 he has consistently raised concerns about this humanitarian problem, and asked states to take action.

“States must now respond to this call for action by adopting an international commitment to stop the bombing and bombardment of populated areas. It is the use of explosive weapons in populated areas that is killing civilians in today’s conflicts. The bombing of towns and cities with these weapons that affect wide areas must stop,” said Thomas Nash, coordinator of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).

There are already precedents of military forces adopting policies to limit the impact of explosive weapons on civilians. For example, in Afghanistan NATO restricted the use of airstrikes in various directives since 2008 and these policies have helped to save civilian lives.ⁱⁱ

“When explosive weapons are launched into populated areas like villages, towns, cities and camps of displaced people, there is a consistent pattern of harm to civilians,” said Roos Boer from PAX. ***“Death, injury, and damage to homes and public infrastructure are the immediate and foreseeable results. The longer term consequences are also devastating: civilians are denied access to shelter, education, health care and other vital infrastructure and are forced to flee. Explosive and toxic remnants left behind are a barrier to the safe return of populations and can prevent people from rebuilding their lives and livelihoods.”***

“The situation in Syria gives a striking illustration of the consequences of explosive weapons on civilians,” said Alma Al-Osta from Handicap International. ***“When we interviewed internally displaced persons in Syria, 60% of those who had new injuries from the crisis had been wounded by explosive weapons. Most of them had very severe injuries: a quarter had undergone amputations.”***ⁱⁱⁱ

Wide area effect weapons have particularly grave consequences for civilians when used in populated areas. Weapons containing a large amount of explosives, the launching of multiple munitions, or inaccurate weapons can all have wide area effects. Ending the use of these weapons in populated areas should be the most urgent task for states concerned with the protection of civilians. Human Rights Watch has described this as the single most significant act states could take to protect civilians in armed conflict.^{iv}

Over 40 countries have publicly recognised this serious humanitarian problem. The UN Special Representative on children and armed conflict, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, the International Committee of the Red Cross, civil society organisations and, most recently, the Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry on Gaza have all called on parties to conflict to take measures to prevent civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.^v

The latest data from Action on Armed Violence, quoted in the report, recorded at least 41,847 people killed or injured by explosive weapons in 2014.^{vi} Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Gaza, Ukraine, Syria, and Yemen were highlighted in the UN report as the worst places in 2014 for the impact on civilians from explosive weapons.

“Our data has shown year after year that civilians bear the brunt of harm from explosive weapons across the world. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas in 2014, 92% of casualties were civilians. The impact on civilians is devastating, and governments must take action to address this global problem,” said Rob Perkins, lead author of the Action on Armed Violence report.

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ABOUT:

INEW is an NGO partnership calling for immediate action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. INEW was established in March 2011 and is governed by a Steering Committee of Action on Armed Violence, Handicap International, Human Rights Watch, PAX, Norwegian People's Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. INEW members undertake research and advocacy to promote greater understanding of the problem and the concrete steps that can be taken to address it. INEW organisations also implement field programmes to reduce the impact of explosive weapons in affected areas. www.inew.org

ⁱ See UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict' UN Document S/2015/453 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/453

ⁱⁱ See Action on Armed Violence, 'Air power in Afghanistan', 2014, <http://bit.ly/1g2hfwT>

ⁱⁱⁱ See Handicap International 'Causes and types of injuries encountered by Handicap International while working with Internally Displaced Persons in Syria: A focus on the impact of explosive weapons,' 2014 <http://bit.ly/1KvVNMB>

^{iv} See Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2015', <http://bit.ly/deadlycargo>

^v See www.inew.org/acknowledgements

^{vi} See Action on Armed Violence, 'Explosive States', 2015 <https://aoav.org.uk/2015/new-report-explosive-violence-casualties-increase-in-2014/>