



**Statement by the International Network on Explosive Weapons
to the UN General Assembly's First Committee on International Security and Disarmament,
New York**

Ms. Laura Boillot, 17 October 2018

I take this opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) to raise concerns over the widespread humanitarian harm that results from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and to encourage all states to take urgent action to provide better protection to civilians in conflict.

The bombing and shelling of towns and cities continues to be a major cause of death and injury to civilians living through conflict around the world - including in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Ukraine, and Pakistan. In addition to high levels of death, injury and trauma, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas also causes severe and long-lasting damage and destruction to essential infrastructure and services such as schools, hospitals, housing, and water and sanitation systems, and is a driver and cause of forced displacement. The impact of attacks using explosive weapons in urban centres is often multiplied because of the interdependency of these services that are essential to the civilian population. Repeated attacks and protracted conflict can have a cumulative effect that renders key infrastructure damaged beyond repair, with further reverberating effects, including lack of access to education, health care, agricultural land, loss of livelihoods, and unemployment.

The state of civilian protection in armed conflict situations continues to be dire. It is particularly acute when explosive weapons with wide area effects are used in urban centres and other populated areas. Of great concern is the use of multiple-launch rocket systems, heavy artillery, and large bombs and missiles in cities, towns and other areas with concentrations of civilians. These weapons are 'area effect weapons', intended for use on open battlefields, but present an excessively high risk of harm to the civilian population when used in towns and cities due to their inaccuracy, high explosive content or because multiple munitions are fired into an area.

This issue has once again been identified as a top humanitarian priority this year, both in the UN Secretary General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and in his New Disarmament Agenda. Central to this has been the UN Secretary General's calls on parties to

conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas. Similarly, the ICRC has described the concept of an “avoidance principle”, a presumption of non-use of such weapons due to the high risk of indiscriminate effects and of consequent harm to civilians. INEW urges all states to endorse this recommendation, in both policy and practice.

It should be a top priority for states this coming year to enshrine a commitment against the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas in the development of new international standards – such as in an international political declaration. Whilst compliance with existing International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is vital, states must also develop clear policy and operational guidance and common standards that can better guide armed forces in decisions over the choice of explosive weapons, and how they are used.

INEW encourages all states to make progress this year in developing an international political declaration that sets a standard against the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas, taking on board the UN Secretary General's recommendation, and that provides a framework for states to develop national measures and guidance, and that contributes to assisting affected communities.

Thank you Chair.