Current context

2019 saw distinct positive movement towards the development of an international political declaration aimed at addressing the harms caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Austria convened an international conference in October 2019 where 133 states participated, and which saw widespread support for developing an international political declaration and kickstarted a series of Geneva-based consultations. At the 2019 First Committee, a cross-regional group of 71 states supported a joint statement that encouraged all states to participate in international efforts to address the impacts of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas on civilians—including through working towards an international political declaration in 2020 that would make commitments on this issue.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN Secretary-General have continued to call on states to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas “owing to the immediate and cumulative, complex and long-term harm resulting from such use.” The focus on the heightened risk of harm from explosive weapons with wide area effects and need to stop this through policy and practice, has also been a repeated key call from the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).

In late 2019 and the early part of 2020, efforts got underway to produce a political declaration to address the civilian harm through binding commitments on states. The government of Ireland convened states in Geneva to discuss elements of a political declaration. Due to the situation caused by COVID-19, negotiations to finalise the text have not yet been able to take place but are expected to resume in Geneva in the coming months.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:
- Acknowledge that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas causes severe harm to individuals and communities, including through both direct and reverberating effects;
- Endorse the UN Secretary-General’s recommendation that states should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas; and
- Support the development of an international political instrument on explosive weapons to protect civilians.

Beyond First Committee, states should:
- Commit to developing, adopting, and implementing an international commitment to address this clear and documented pattern of harm by stopping the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas and assisting affected people and communities;
- 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 of and impact of explosive weapons in populated areas including age, sex, and disability, disaggregated recording of casualties; and
- Recognise the rights of survivors, families of those killed or injured, and affected communities and respond to their short and long-term needs.
END NOTES


5. See Aid in Danger, Insecurity Insight, http://www.insecurityinsight.org/aidindanger/explosives


