



## Explosive weapons in populated areas – the challenge for civilian protection

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 Protection of Civilians in June 2012 to address the need for action on humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas. INEW encourages states to use the debate to:

- Acknowledge the severe impact on civilians caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas;
- Call for the collection of data on the humanitarian problem and on national and multi-lateral policies regarding use of explosive weapons;<sup>2</sup>
- Call for an end to the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.

### An urgent humanitarian issue

According to INEW member NGO Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), in 2011 at least 21,499 civilians were reported killed or injured by explosive weapons and that 87% of these casualties occurred in populated areas. The problem of explosive weapons in populated areas was clearly illustrated in countries such as Libya, Sudan and Cote d'Ivoire (where the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator drew attention to this specific issue) as well as in Iraq and Afghanistan.

2012 has already seen stark examples of the impact on civilians from explosive weapon use in populated areas. The bombardment of Homs and other urban areas in Syria led to the UN Security Council calling for the Syrian government to “end the use of heavy weapons in population centres.”<sup>3</sup> Here, a particular cause for concern has been heavy explosive weapons that can have wide area effects, such as multiple launch rockets, high explosive artillery and mortars, as well as car bombs and other IEDs.

### An opportunity for new standards

Recognition of the distinct problems associated with explosive weapons has grown strongly over recent years:

- The 2010 UN Secretary-General's Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict expressed increasing concern at this issue and urged Member States to support data collection on the humanitarian problem, and to make available information on national policies.<sup>4</sup>
- The April 2011 UN Secretary-General's Report on Children in Armed Conflict noted with respect to Somalia that, “of particular concern was the recent increase in the number of civilians, among them many children, being killed and injured owing to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.”<sup>5</sup>
- In 2011, the International Committee of the Red Cross 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 wide a wide impact area should be avoided in densely populated areas.”<sup>6</sup>

Building on this clear direction, the June 2012 Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict presents an opportunity for states to express their support for concrete steps that will curb the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and to provide stronger civilian protection 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, IKV Pax Christi, Medact, Norwegian People's Aid, Oxfam and Save the Children UK.

<sup>2</sup> See recommendation 51, report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, 11 November 2010, S/2010/579.

<sup>3</sup> Statement by the President of the Security Council, 21 March 2012, S/PRST/2012/6.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, 11 November 2010, S/2010/579

<sup>5</sup> Report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 23 April 2011, A/65/820-S/2011/250

<sup>6</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Humanitarian Law and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts, October 2011, 31IC/11/5.1.2