



Explosive Weapons¹ and the Protection of Civilians and Healthcare in Armed Conflict May 2017

*Briefing paper by the International Network on Explosive Weapons ahead of the
UN Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians, 25 May 2017*

Humanitarian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA)

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has been identified as a significant cause of harm to civilians in conflicts around the world. Data indicate that approximately 92% of those reported killed and injured when explosive weapons are used in populated areas are civilians. In 2016, over 32,000 civilians were recorded killed or injured by explosive weapons, with Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Turkey having the highest numbers of civilian deaths and injuries².

Beyond those killed and injured, an even greater number of civilians are affected as a result of damage to essential infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, housing, and water and sanitation systems. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas represents one of the main causes of forced displacement. Countless civilians are driven from their homes and displaced, and suffer from psychological distress

The impact of explosive weapons on the protection of civilians and healthcare in armed conflict

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas results in the destruction of vital infrastructure, such as water and electricity supplies, which affects the public health of the civilian population in affected communities. Damage to hospitals impacts the civilian population's ability to access and use essential medical services.

A response: developing an international political declaration on EWIPA

Reflecting the urgent nature of this humanitarian problem, the UN Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have repeatedly called on states to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas. Furthermore, the UN Secretary General has called on states to engage constructively in efforts to develop a political declaration to address the issue. Discussions have started towards developing an international political instrument to address this humanitarian problem, and



This is the Dar Al-Shifa hospital which is in a civilian neighbourhood of Aleppo. Over several months the hospital was shelled in four separate attacks and damaged so badly in May 2013 that it could no longer function. In the final attack around 25 people died. The rest were moved to a field hospital in a secret location.

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¹ Explosive weapons include improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as well as explosive ordnance such as mortars, rockets, artillery shells and aircraft bombs. These weapons use blast and fragmentation, and kill and injure people in the area around the point of detonation. When these weapons have been used in public places such as markets and residential areas, people that should be protected have often been severely affected, both directly, from the blast and fragment projection, and through damage to vital infrastructure such as to hospitals, housing and water and sanitation systems.

² Action on Armed Violence, 2016 annual explosive violence data (forthcoming, May 2017)

already 70 states have spoken out on the issue of EWIPA. The time has come for states to make a clear collective commitment on this vital humanitarian question.

Recommendations to states:

Against the background of ongoing suffering as a result of this practice in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and other conflict situations, this issue merits priority attention. At the upcoming UN Security Council's Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians on 25 May 2017, INEW urges states to:

- Endorse the UN Secretary-General's and ICRC's recommendation that states should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.
- 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.

States should also:

- 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 to ensure a response to their short- and long-term needs.

About the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW):

The International Network on Explosive Weapons calls for immediate action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. States and other actors should:

- Acknowledge that use of explosive weapons in populated areas tends to cause severe harm to individuals and communities and furthers suffering by damaging vital infrastructure;
- Strive to avoid such harm and suffering in any situation, review and strengthen national policies and practices on use of explosive weapons and gather and make available relevant data;
- Work for full realisation of the rights of victims and survivors;
- Develop stronger international standards, including certain prohibitions and restrictions on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Contact:

Laura Boillot, INEW Coordinator, laura@article36.org, +44(0)7515-575-175

[@explosiveweapon](http://www.inew.org)