



INEW statement: The Way Forward

Vienna Conference “Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare”

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Thank you Ambassador,

I am speaking today on behalf of INEW, the International Network on Explosive Weapons. We are an international civil society coalition, established in 2011, based on our shared concern over the widespread, severe and preventable humanitarian harm resulting from bombing and shelling in towns, cities and other populated areas.

As we have heard at this meeting - when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, civilians are killed and injured, vital infrastructure which civilians rely upon is destroyed, and people are forced to flee. This pattern of harm has been well documented across a range of contexts including Afghanistan, Cote d’Ivoire, Gaza, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, to name a few examples.

The conduct of military operations in urban settings, and other places where there are concentrations of civilians looks only set to continue, and indeed increase. But more can be done to protect civilians in these situations. Militaries should strive to take operations outside of populated areas.

Of particular concern to INEW is the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in towns and cities. Parties to conflict must stop choosing to use inappropriate weapons in populated areas if we are to prevent the high levels of civilian deaths, injuries and other harms that have regrettably become the norm.

We have been encouraged by the progress made in recent years to implement the Safe Schools Declaration to protect education from attack. This has been a valuable instrument in setting new international standards and shaping state behaviour. It shows that political instruments can be effective frameworks for states to advance humanitarian objectives and codify parameters of acceptable behaviour.

It is our view that the establishment of an international political declaration is a necessary and an achievable step to strengthen the protection of civilians in urban warfare. We urge states to take this conference as the beginning of a process toward that goal, with a view to establishing the highest possible standard to better protect civilians in conflict situations.

Such an instrument will not stop all civilian casualties in conflict, but it can provide a tool that lays out new expectations of behaviour.

We have shared a paper at the meeting with our views on elements for a political declaration which is also on the inew.org website, and our view is that a political declaration should commit states to:

- Develop operational policies and procedures that will stop the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas
- Share positive practice and experiences
- Provide assistance to victims and affected communities
- Support and undertake data gathering, including casualty recording, with data on victims disaggregated by age, sex and disability
- Enable humanitarian and protection measures, and
- Build a community of practice, including through regular meetings to discuss the issue and progress towards reducing harm.

In doing this, it will strengthen the normative framework – and will make it clear, at a time when armed conflict is increasingly waged in urban settings, that we are working against the use of widespread explosive force in contexts where civilians are living ever closer together.

We thank Austria for convening this discussion. It shows the growing recognition among states on the need to provide a response, we believe that this meeting has been a turning point and provides a platform to launch the negotiations for an international political declaration with all interested states and partners. We look forward to the meeting in Geneva in November.

Thank you.