



## Concept Note

### Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare

### **Towards a Political Declaration to Address the Humanitarian Harm Arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas**

#### Geneva Consultations

**18 November 2019,  
Room VII, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

#### **Date and Venue**

The consultation will be held on 18 November, 2019 from 10.00 – 13.00 in Room VII at the Palais des Nations, Geneva (arrival, registration and coffee from 09.30).

#### **Process**

Ireland is pleased to invite all delegations to an informal consultation on the elaboration of a Political Declaration that addresses the humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The principal objective of the consultation is to initiate an inclusive and transparent process through which the international community can engage in discussions on relevant thematic elements for inclusion in a Political Declaration.

The consultation on 18 November 2019 is the first in a series of at least three consultations that will be organised in Geneva and chaired by Ireland in the coming months. The outcome of the first consultation, based on the interventions made by delegations as well written submissions, will be a draft Political Declaration. This draft will be circulated as soon as possible after the first consultation and will form the basis for further discussions at subsequent consultations to be convened in early 2020. These subsequent consultations will be organised for one full day each.

The ultimate aim is to agree a Political Declaration, to be adopted in Dublin in late spring 2020.

#### **Background**

Armed conflicts are increasingly taking place in and around populated areas. The 2019 Report of the UN Secretary-General on protection of civilians in armed conflict estimated that over 20,000 civilians were killed or injured by explosive weapons in 2018. Moreover, when explosive weapons, including improvised explosive devices, were used in populated areas, the majority of those killed or injured were civilians. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas can cause long-term humanitarian harm which far outlasts the conflicts in which they are used. Beyond the immediate injuries and deaths caused, the destruction of housing, schools, hospitals, water and sanitation systems and other crucial infrastructure, means that the civilian population is severely affected over the longer term.

Momentum on this issue has been building among States over the past number of years, with international and regional conferences, joint statements at UNGA First Committee, and Geneva-based dialogues and workshops all raising concern and calling for action to address the harm to civilians caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

While International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides the legal framework, a growing number of States have expressed the need to strengthen compliance with IHL and enhance the protection of civilians during active hostilities in populated areas. The increasing urbanisation of armed conflict raises important questions about how military policies and practice address risks to civilians, understand impacts, and mitigate civilian harm from explosive weapons used in populated areas.

The purpose of an international Political Declaration should be to promote actions designed to enhance the protection of civilians in populated areas during armed conflict and to reduce humanitarian harm from explosive weapons with wide area effects. A Political Declaration should foster behavioural change and strengthen the protection of civilians and enhance compliance with existing IHL.