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A decade's data: 9/10 casualties in armed conflicts are civilians when explosive weapons are used in towns and cities

(Tuesday, May 25, 2021) - Over the past ten years Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), an INEW member, has [collected data documenting casualties of explosive weapon use in towns, cities and other populated areas](#). The data shows the severe pattern of harm that has been documented annually-- that when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 91% of those killed and injured were civilians. This compares to 25% in other areas.

It finds that:

- There were 357,370 documented deaths and injuries by explosive weapons in 28,879 incidents in the last ten years. Of these, 262,413 were civilians – 73%.
- In total, 238,892 civilians were killed and injured in populated areas over a decade.
- When explosive weapons were used in towns, cities and other populated areas 91% of those killed and injured were civilians. This compares to 25% in other areas.
- Incidents were recorded in 123 countries and territories around the world in the ten years.
- The highest number of civilian deaths and injuries in the last decade occurred in Syria (77,534 civilian casualties), Iraq (56,316), Afghanistan (28,424), Pakistan (20,719), and Yemen (16,645).

The International Committee of the Red Cross has estimated that more than 50 million people were affected by war in cities and has backed efforts to restrict use of explosive weapons in towns, cities and other populated areas due to the civilian devastation and suffering. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/explosive-weapons-cities-civilian-devastation-and-suffering-must-stop>

Governments, international and civil society organisations have participated in negotiations of an international Political Declaration since November 2019, that will ultimately see states negotiate stronger rules that would protect civilians from use of explosive weapons in towns, cities and other populated areas. The negotiations have been delayed due to COVID. Final negotiations are expected to conclude later in 2021.

[The UN Secretary-General has renewed his support for this initiative](#), saying that it is critical to continue supporting efforts to develop a political declaration in which States commit to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. (UN Secretary General report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, May 2021, S/2021/423)

In context of recent & upcoming events:

- Gaza- Israel

The devastating impact explosive weapon use has on civilians can be seen today in [Gaza and Israel](#) where airstrikes and rockets being fired into populated areas is just one stark and current example. These contexts join a long list of [towns and cities](#) including Tripoli, Idlib, Aleppo, Donetsk, Mosul, Raqqa, where civilians bear the brunt.

- Ireland-led Political Declaration set to see finalised text in 2021

States are currently in the process of negotiating [an Ireland-led international political declaration](#) that would set new international standards on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. [So far, over 100 countries have recognised the harm](#) caused to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in cities, towns and other populated areas.

- The UN Security Council will hold an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on Tuesday May, 25.
- On May 6, the Federal Parliament in Belgium was the first to pass a resolution that asks its government to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

What the data shows:

This decade's worth of data shows unacceptably high civilian casualty rates and a clear and consistent pattern of civilian harm across different countries and contexts each year, wherever explosive weapons were used in towns and cities.

Of particular concerns is the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects, including weapons that produce a large blast area or spread fragments widely such as large aircraft bombs, weapons that deliver multiple munitions that saturate a large area, such as multiple-launch rocket systems, and inaccurate weapons, such as mortars, that may land anywhere within a wide area of the intended target.

These weapons are designed for use in open battlefields, yet as this method of warfare continues to take place in populated dense areas, tens of thousands civilians are killed, experience life-changing injuries, and suffer from destruction of homes, hospitals, schools and vital services, and the trauma of living through bombing.

Comments:

“This pattern of civilian harm is unacceptable and must stop or else we risk another decade of civilian suffering and devastation. The negotiation of the political declaration is an opportunity to set new standards against the use of heavy explosive weapons in towns and cities, to better protect civilians and vital civilian infrastructure located in cities and which the population relies on for its survival and wellbeing.” – Laura Boillot, Coordinator of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).

“The evidence is absolutely clear and unequivocal. In the last decade, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 91% of those killed and injured were civilians. This compares to 25% in other areas. This is data taken from reputable English language media from almost 29,000 incidents, from 123 countries and territories around the world. And such data, impacting over a quarter of a million civilians, points to an equally unshakeable truth: that when explosive weapons are used in towns and cities, civilians will be harmed. As true as it is today in Gaza as it was a decade ago in Iraq and beyond.” – Iain Overton, Executive Director, Action on Armed Violence (AOAV).

About the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW):

INEW is an international network of NGOs that calls for immediate action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

<http://www.inew.org/>

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