



## **INEW closing remarks to the Geneva consultations**

Delivered by Laura Boillot, INEW Coordinator

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Thank you Ambassador.

On behalf of INEW, and as we come to a close, I would like to share a few reflections on the past couple of days and the direction that we need to be moving in.

We have appreciated the constructive way that most delegations have approached these discussions. And as we said at the start of this meeting, we believe that the draft declaration text holds potential to make a meaningful contribution to the protection of civilians. But certain decisions will now need to be made.

So let us remind ourselves of the aim and purpose of this initiative: the ambition of this agreement is to strengthen the protection of civilians.

- It must prevent and reduce harm from the use of explosive weapons in towns, cities and other populated areas.
- It must set out expectations for behaviour through policy change, and that can be enacted in practice.
- It must do more than simply reaffirm the need for states to abide by the law.

And there is an urgency to this, on a daily basis we see images of civilian suffering in Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia, Iraq, and elsewhere.

Centrally, this political declaration needs to establish a presumption against the use of explosive weapons when they have wide area effects in populated areas, owing to the scale of blast and fragmentation, inaccuracy of delivery, and firing of multiple munitions across an area. When explosive weapons have wide area effects they present a significant and heightened likelihood of harms to civilians. This recognition and the factors that produce wide area effects, needs to be embedded in the text to signpost how the central commitments should be implemented by armed forces. Adoption of strong commitments are critical to showing that this community is working seriously to improve protection for civilians.

The political declaration must also address the humanitarian impacts from bombing and shelling in populated areas, by assisting victims, and driving forward actions to understand and respond to the harms caused.

This also means addressing the reverberating effects, which stem from damage and destruction to infrastructure, which are often inter-connected and includes destruction of housing, hospitals, and schools, power networks, and water and sanitation systems. Such effects can far outweigh the immediate civilian death toll from an attack, they can be experienced by people in areas far beyond the location of the initial attack, and the impacts can be felt for weeks, months or even years after the initial attack.

Work on the explosive weapons agenda has been ongoing for over a decade now. The concept of reverberating effects is firmly embedded in key literature, there is broad understanding of what this term means, which is consistent across materials produced by different agencies and entities. And there is an opportunity through the follow-up work to implement the declaration to build such understandings and policies on how to address these.

As others have said, much of the success of this work will come down to its effective implementation and the follow up process of work that follows. The Safe Schools declaration provides a useful example of how our collective work under this political declaration could be progressed. There have been declaration meetings organised every couple of years, gathering endorsing and other interested states, without a formal mechanism to do so, and without being overly prescriptive of how that process of work will be organised. Nor is it too onerous on endorsing states beyond implementing the commitments in the declaration.

INEW is ready to play a key role as a central partner in this future process of work. It will be by building this community of practice, based on continued collaboration between states and international and civil society organisations, working together to promote progressive implementation of the declaration that its eventual success will depend.

Ireland - we appreciate your leadership on this issue and on this declaration process, and over the last three days. We appeal to you now, in this final stage of the process and as you work to finalise the text over the next few weeks, to be guided by developing a text that embodies actions that will have clear humanitarian benefit and effect. This declaration can be an instrument that saves lives, and it is on this basis – addressing the humanitarian consequences of bombing and shelling in towns, cities and other populated areas – that we have been participating in this process. We want to be able to support this declaration, and we want to play an active role in working with states and other partners to encourage states to support and endorse it, and work with others to promote its implementation.

Thank you.