

**Ireland to present draft declaration to protect civilians
from explosive weapons in populated areas**

(Geneva, 16 June 2022): On Friday 17 June, Ireland will present the draft *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* in Geneva.

The declaration marks the culmination of almost three years of consultations involving Member States, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil-society organizations, including the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).

The declaration's focus is to address the devastating and long-lasting humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ICRC and INEW welcome the collective commitment embodied in the declaration to restrict the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and to ensure assistance to survivors as part of a range of measures to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict and respect for international humanitarian law.

Explosive weapons cause extensive civilian death and injury when bombs, artillery, rockets, mortars and other explosive weapons with wide-area effects are used in towns, cities and other populated areas. These weapons can also damage the environment and destroy homes, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure essential for civilians' survival.

Today, some 50 million people live in urban areas affected by conflict. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, civilians account for around 90 per cent of people killed and injured. The UN Secretary-General continues to call on States to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas due to the high likelihood of their indiscriminate effects and humanitarian consequences.

OCHA Humanitarian Affairs Officer Dominique Gassauer said: "The human cost and humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in urban areas, particularly those with wide-area effects, are devastating and could be avoided. We encourage Member States to step up efforts to better protect civilians from the use of these weapons."

ICRC Legal Adviser Eirini Giorgou said: “Military must review and adapt policies and practices to reflect both operational realities and humanitarian issues. That’s imperative to effectively comply with international humanitarian law. This means implementing concrete measures to reduce risks to civilians. In the ICRC’s view, this also means avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas as a matter of policy.”

Laura Boillot, Coordinator of INEW, said: “Civil-society organizations continue to play a crucial role in bringing the use of explosive weapons to the forefront of global attention. From Syria to Ukraine, when bombs, rockets, artillery and other explosive weapons are used in cities, towns and other populated areas, it is always civilians who suffer the most. States need to join this political declaration, impose stronger restrictions on the use of these weapons, and work to end this deadly pattern of harm.”

Ambassador Michael Gaffey, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations in Geneva, said: “Ireland looks forward to the conclusion of the negotiations tomorrow. The political declaration includes a powerful recognition of the humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and highlights the severe, long-lasting impacts it has on civilians. Most significantly, the declaration includes ambitious and forward-looking actions that States will take to address those impacts, as well as a commitment to strengthen compliance with and improve the implementation of international humanitarian law.

“We will call on States to come together to collectively implement the declaration. We hope that concluding the negotiations tomorrow is just the beginning rather than the end of this important process, which we hope will make a real difference on the ground to the lives of civilians caught up in conflict.”

Note to editors:

Ireland launched a political process in November 2019 to develop a declaration to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, following the Vienna Conference on the Protection of Civilians in Urban Warfare in October 2019.

States will be invited to sign the declaration at a conference later this year.

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