



SIGN THE POLITICAL DECLARATION ON EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS

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CAN SAVE LIVES**



WHY SHOULD STATES SIGN THE POLITICAL DECLARATION ON EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS?

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is the leading cause of harm to civilians in armed conflict.

Each year, tens of thousands of civilians are killed and injured by explosive weapons. Many of those injured suffer complex and life changing injuries and continue to experience psychological distress from the traumatic experience of living under bombing. Data shows that when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 90 per cent of the victims are civilians.

Beyond the risk of death and injury for civilians, use of explosive weapons in populated areas causes widespread displacement and destroys critical civilian infrastructure such as housing, hospitals and schools, as well as power supplies, water and sanitation systems and impacts the provision of essential services to the civilian population. Use of these weapons often results in contamination from unexploded ordnance, posing a threat to civilian populations for years after the conflict has ended.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a persistent pattern of harm that has been documented across different contexts including in Gaza, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen – to name just a few recent examples.

Stronger standards implemented through changes in national policy and practice are both possible and necessary to increase civilian protection and reduce harm.

By signing the political declaration States will recognise that explosive weapons pose specific risks for civilians when they are used in populated areas and will commit to take action to reduce harm over the years ahead.

While the declaration gives rise to commitments for individual signatory states, its implementation will require that states work together in a collaborative and constructive spirit, including with the UN, ICRC and civil society, to strengthen the protection of civilians. It will require dedicated work by all these actors over time, building on the shared goal of reducing harm to civilians.

Streets of Gaza during Israel's bombing,
May 2021 © NPA Palestine/Mohammed Zaanoun





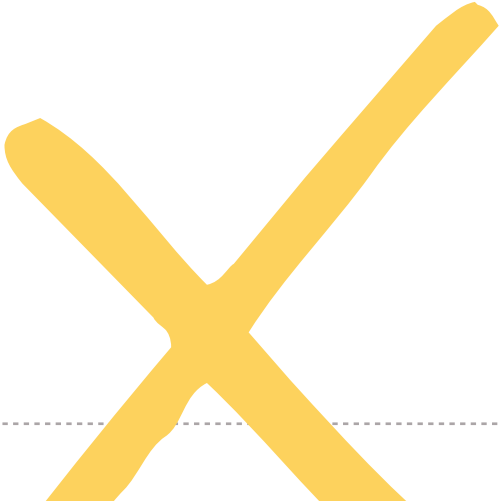
HOW DOES A STATE SIGN THE POLITICAL DECLARATION – AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The “Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas” will open for signature at the Signing Conference in Dublin, Ireland on 18 November 2022.

States wishing to sign the Declaration should communicate this at the earliest possible date by Note Verbale to the Permanent Mission of Ireland in Geneva or the Permanent Mission of Ireland in New York.

After the Dublin Signing Conference and on an ongoing basis, States can write to the government of Ireland as the depository of signatures to the political declaration to indicate their intention to sign it. Ireland will maintain a list of signatory states.

Any State can sign the political declaration regardless of whether they have been part of the consultation process to develop and finalise the text, and regardless of whether they possess or use explosive weapons. All States that are committed to strengthen the protection of civilians in conflict and reducing harm should sign the political declaration.





WHAT DOES THE DECLARATION OFFER AND WHAT DOES IT REQUIRE STATES TO DO?


States that sign the political declaration are committing to work together, along with the UN, ICRC and civil society to strengthen the protection of civilians from explosive weapons.

Implementing the declaration will require action in a number of key areas, including:

- Developing national policies to restrict or refrain from the use of certain explosive weapons in populated areas. Ending the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas will be central to this work because such effects cannot be limited to a specific military objective (due to the size of the blast and fragmentation radius, inaccuracy of delivery and/or use of multiple munitions across an area) and therefore expose civilians and civilian objects to unacceptable risks.
- Improved understanding of, and taking steps to limit, the impact of military operations on critical infrastructure which disrupts the provision of vital services to the civilian population giving rise to severe and long-lasting humanitarian impacts, also known as 'reverberating' effects.
- Gathering and sharing data to better understand humanitarian impacts, including data on civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure, and on the use of explosive weapons.
- Providing assistance to victims, their families, and affected communities, and facilitating humanitarian access to civilian populations in need. This includes enhancing understanding of the multiple challenges of accessing and providing assistance in urban contexts when explosive weapons are being used.

The declaration is a practical tool that sets an agenda for changes to military policy and practice, including, critically, changes in the planning and conduct of military operations, as well as humanitarian measures to assist survivors, family members of those injured and killed and affected communities; and commitments to work to address the long-term impacts resulting from the destruction of infrastructure.





States joining the declaration, and other stakeholders, will continue to meet in the future to examine the causes of civilian harm and strengthen policies and practices to prevent that harm. Unlike international treaties and conventions, there are no formal financial requirements associated with joining the political declaration - although ongoing funding from states that can contribute will be necessary to support the convening of conferences and other activities under the declaration.



WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL IT MAKE?

The political declaration is the first formal international recognition that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences that must be addressed urgently. This is key, as identifying and recognising a problem is the first step towards tackling it.

The declaration also recognizes that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas poses unacceptable risks to civilians, particularly when the weapons have wide area effects. It promotes stronger standards for the protection of civilians and commits states which sign the declaration to implement these standards through changes to their national policy and practice. The declaration can also provide a basis for stigmatising harmful actions, such as use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.

Agreement of the political declaration marks a major step forward and a significant contribution to protecting civilians from bombing and shelling in towns and cities. It demonstrates states' recognition of the grave humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and their commitment to take concrete action to address it.

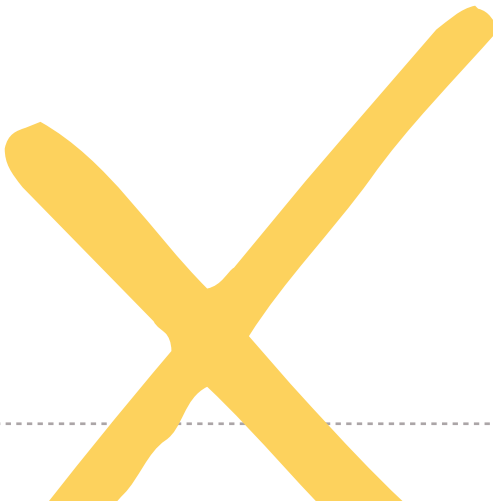
The declaration should be seen as a starting point—not an end point. A key area will be changing military practice away from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. There is much more that needs to be done to strengthen the protection of civilians and building stronger standards and driving forward significant changes takes time.



SUGGESTED FURTHER ACTIONS

States should:

- Sign the Political Declaration at the Signing Conference in Dublin on 18 November 2022 and publicly announce their intention to do so ahead of the conference. States that are not yet in a position to do so can indicate their interest in signing the declaration by Note Verbale to the Permanent Mission of Ireland in Geneva or the Permanent Mission of Ireland in New York.
- Encourage other States to sign the Political Declaration, both in Dublin and thereafter, to help to promote the adoption and implementation of the declaration by the greatest number of States possible.
- Continue to publicly acknowledge and call for action to address the severe harm to individuals and communities resulting from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, both direct and indirect.
- Endorse the policy recommendation to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas, as called for by the UN Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross, and incorporate this into national policy and practice.
- Start to assess the steps required at the national level (revision of existing or development of new policy and practice, training, etc) to implement the commitments in the political declaration and designate government focal points for this, including in the areas of military policy and practice, victim assistance, and data collection.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)
www.inew.org

The Explosive Weapons Monitor
www.explosiveweaponsmonitor.org

Ireland
www.dfa.ie/ewipa

ICRC
www.icrc.org/en/explosive-weapons-populated-areas

UN
www.unocha.org/themes/explosive-weapons-populated-areas

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