



**Statement by the International Network on Explosive Weapons
United Nations General Assembly First Committee – Disarmament and International Security**

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Thank you, Chair,

It is an honor to address the First Committee today on behalf of INEW – the International Network on Explosive Weapons – a coalition of civil society organizations working to prevent the devastating humanitarian consequences from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Work continues at First Committee this year as the world is witnessing horrifying civilian suffering from bombing and shelling in towns and cities throughout Ukraine. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas in this conflict has resulted in widespread death, injuries and destruction. Military shelling has turned cities to ashes. The pattern of harm associated with the use of explosive weapons in populated areas – where 9 out of 10 casualties are civilians – is clear not only in Ukraine, but also in Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia and other states experiencing similar devastation. It is a global issue that requires an urgent global solution.

As recent conflicts have given new relevance to collective action towards such a solution, on 17 June this year, states finalized the text of the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. This marks the culmination of almost three years of consultations led by Ireland, and more than a decade of calls for action to address harm to civilians from bombing and shelling in towns and cities.

The Political Declaration is a milestone achievement and an important starting point. It is the first formal international recognition that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences which must be addressed urgently. It sets the foundation for future work to strengthen the protection of civilians. To start, states must sign onto the political declaration at the high-level international Dublin Conference next month on 18 November.

Over 100 states have publicly acknowledged the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and we expect to see a broad range of states sign onto the declaration in Dublin. We applaud these states for taking swift action to address the grave humanitarian consequences caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and call on those who have not yet done so, to follow suit and publicly commit to signing onto the declaration without further delay.

States that sign onto the 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 the development of national policies and changes to military practices to place effective limits on the use of certain explosive weapons, such as ending the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas to avoid civilian harm. Implementation also requires addressing the long-term impacts that stem from damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure, gathering and sharing data to better understand

humanitarian impacts, and providing necessary and lifesaving assistance to victims, which includes their families, and affected communities.

As a survivor of bombing myself, I can attest that the scars caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are deep and permanent to the primary affected persons, and they reverberate further to their families, communities, and society in a compounded manner. Civilian suffering continues long after the use of explosive weapons has ended, as affected persons are sentenced to life-long physical and mental health injuries with complex and lasting psycho-social distress caused by the trauma and effects of bombing. Explosive weapons leave explosive ordnance contamination for decades after a conflict is over, forcefully displacing populations, damaging and destroying housing, hospitals, schools, agricultural land, infrastructure, impeding humanitarian access and the provision of critical services, as well as hampering development. It leaves gregarious amounts of debris, waste and toxic chemicals.

The political declaration recognizes that these risks to civilians are, in fact, unacceptable. It provides an important framework for future collaboration in addressing this issue and is a vital step in the process aimed to increase protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

Therefore, we look forward to seeing you in Ireland to endorse the declaration on 18 November. We would also like to extend an invitation to a Civil Society Forum in Dublin on 17 November which aims to bring all stakeholders together to build a shared vision of the political declaration and discuss how we can work together to promote its effective implementation.

This is not only a moment to reflect on the important milestone of finalizing the Political Declaration, but it also marks the start of the work ahead that we look forward to being part of, and working in collaboration with many of you.

Thank you.