



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR MEDIA

### International review conference on the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons, 23 April 2024

- The conference to review implementation on the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas will be hosted by the government of Norway and will take place in Oslo, on 23 April, 2024.
- This conference is the first international follow-up conference to review implementation of the Political Declaration since the high-level international conference in Dublin to adopt the Political Declaration on 18 November, 2022, which saw the Declaration formally adopted by 183 states.
- The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is the leading cause of civilian casualties in contemporary armed conflicts, and this Political Declaration is the first formal international recognition that this must be addressed urgently and directly.
- INEW calls on all states to endorse the Declaration which aims to reduce civilian harm and strengthen the protection of civilians, by imposing limits on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and by assisting victims and affected communities during and after conflict.
- On the eve of the Review Conference, civil society organisations, campaigners and survivors of armed conflict gather at the Protection Forum to bring attention to the needs of people and communities affected by explosive weapons.

Follow INEW on [@explosiveweapon](#) and [#StopBombingCivilians](#). For media enquiries contact:

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## Questions and Answers

### What is the International Network on Explosive Weapons – INEW?

- The International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) is an NGO partnership calling for immediate action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It comprises more than 50 organisations from across 25 countries. The steering committee is comprised of Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), Article 36, Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), Humanity and Inclusion (HI), Human Rights Watch, PAX, Norwegian People's Aid, Save the Children and SEHLAC.

[www.inew.org](http://www.inew.org) | [@explosiveweapon](#)

### What is the Explosive Weapons Monitor?

- The Explosive Weapons Monitor is a civil society initiative that conducts research and analysis on harms from and practices of explosive weapon use and monitors the universalisation and

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<sup>1</sup> [States that have endorsed the Political Declaration](#)

implementation of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

[www.explosiveweaponsmonitor.org](http://www.explosiveweaponsmonitor.org) | @weaponsmonitor

### **What is the International Review Conference taking place in Oslo on 23 April 2024?**

- The conference on 23 April will review progress on implementation of the ***Political Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas*** (See full text: *“Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas”* [here](#))
- Norway will open the meeting, with other high-level representatives from the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), the United Nations, the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), and survivor of armed conflict and activist, Marwa Almbaed.
- The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is the leading cause of civilian casualties in contemporary armed conflicts. The Political Declaration is the first formal international recognition that this must be addressed urgently and directly and implementation is key to seeing change.
- INEW calls on all states to endorse and implement the Political Declaration to reduce civilian harm and strengthen the protection of civilians, by imposing limits on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and by assisting victims and affected communities during and after conflict.
- The Declaration was adopted on 18 November 2022 in Dublin, Ireland after three years of diplomatic negotiations led by Ireland, involving States, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil-society organisations, including the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).
- INEW and its Irish partner Norwegian Red Cross will host a Protection Forum event prior to the Review Conference on the afternoon of 22 April. This event will bring together states, international organisations and civil society ahead of the conference to ensure that the implementation of the political declaration is just the beginning of a long-term, committed and effective process of work.

### **Which states have endorsed the Political Declaration?**

- Currently 86 states have endorsed the Political Declaration, including some users of explosive weapons as well as several affected countries:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Kiribati, Kuwait, Laos, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Maldives, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Türkiye, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay

### **Which international and civil society organisations are working on this issue?**

- The United Nations Secretary-General and United Nations humanitarian agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society organisations like the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), for more than a decade, have been calling for immediate action to address harm to civilians from bombing and shelling in towns and cities.

- Successive UN Secretary-Generals have called on parties to armed conflicts to refrain from using explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.
- The ICRC has long urged states and parties in armed conflicts to avoid using explosive weapons with wide area effects in densely populated areas, due to the high risk of indiscriminate effects and harm to civilians.

#### **What difference does the Political Declaration make?**

- The Political Declaration is the first formal international recognition that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has severe humanitarian consequences which must be urgently addressed. It also recognises that the unacceptable risks to civilians are exacerbated when the weapons have wide area effects.
- The declaration promotes stronger standards to protect civilians and commits states that endorse to make the necessary changes to their national policy and practice, including military policies and operational rules of engagement.
- 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. Much more needs to be done to better protect civilians and to build stronger standards to drive forward significant change. This takes time.

#### **What does the Political Declaration commit states to do?**

- States that endorse the political declaration commit to work together, with the UN, ICRC and civil society, to strengthen the protection of civilians from explosive weapons. To uphold their commitments, states should [BD1] take action in a number of key areas, including:
  - o Imposing limits on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to avoid civilian harm – the centrepiece of the declaration.
  - o Addressing both the short- and long-term effects, resulting from the damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure.
  - o Providing assistance to victims, including: people injured, families of those killed and injured; and conflict-affected communities.
  - o Collecting and sharing data on civilian harm from explosive weapon use.
  - o Holding follow-up meetings to review how the Declaration is being implemented and to share examples of military policy and practice, to protect civilians from explosive weapon use.
- The declaration is a practical tool which sets an agenda for changes to military policy and practice, including, essential updates [BD2] in the planning and conduct of military operations, as well as humanitarian measures to assist survivors, family members of those injured and killed in affected communities. It also commits states to address the long-term effects of the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

#### **Which countries are most affected?**

- The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a widespread problem and pattern of harm experienced in a wide range of countries and contexts. Over the past decade, incidents involving civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons has been documented in 130 countries, (AOAV).
- Some of the most affected countries include Gaza, Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Sudan and Myanmar.

#### **What are explosive weapons?**

- Explosive weapons are conventional weapons that detonate explosives to affect an area with blast and fragmentation. They come in a wide range of types and sizes.
- There are many types of explosive weapons, including mortar bombs, artillery shells, rockets, and aircraft bombs. These weapons explode – killing and injuring people, or damaging vehicles and buildings, through the blast and fragmentation that an explosion creates around the point of detonation.

- Many explosive weapon systems were designed for use in open battlefields and have devastating consequences when used in populated areas with concentrations of civilians and infrastructure essential to their survival.
- Particular concerns are focused on explosive weapons with wide area effects, which, due to their scale of explosive force have a wide blast and fragmentation radius, or are inaccurate, or deliver multiple munitions across a targeted area, or have a combination of these characteristics – causing widespread damage and as such are inappropriate choices for use in towns and cities.
- Different types of explosive weapons may be delivered in different ways (some are fired from the ground, others are dropped from the air), and they may vary in the scale of effects that they create, but they share the tendency to affect an area with blast and fragmentation. They come in a wide range of types and sizes, and include:
  - **Airdropped bombs** – Certain airdropped bombs have a very high explosive yield that can create a powerful blast effect, which can lead to the collapse of entire buildings. Because of this power they may, in certain situations, create blast and fragmentation effects beyond the intended target even if they land in the intended place. Unguided gravity bombs, dropped from an aircraft, can be difficult to place accurately on a target. As such, an aircraft may release multiple bombs in what is called a 'stick'. This extends the area effects of these weapons still further.
  - **Multi-barrel rocket launcher** – This system can launch up to 40 rockets in 20 seconds, producing multiple warhead detonations across a very wide area. Rockets are sometimes fired in groups or 'salvos', creating additional inaccuracy and significantly increasing the area effects that will be created. Multi-barrel rocket launchers are designed to fire salvos of rockets over long distances.
  - **Mortars** – Mortars are typically used as indirect fire weapons. They fire projectiles from a launch tube into the air that then impact at a location that might be several kilometres away. For some common types at a distance of 7km, the chance of a projectile landing within 100m from the target might only be just over 50%. Because of their inaccuracy, mortars will sometimes be used in 'mass fires', with multiple mortars firing shells from separate firing section locations to enhance the chance of striking the intended target, thereby extending the area effect.
  - **Artillery** - Firing of artillery rounds, or 'shells', is highly inaccurate. A number of artillery guns (a 'battery') is typically used to deliver multiple rounds at a target. Because of uncertainty of individual firings, multiple firings might be necessary to have confidence of affecting the intended target. As multiple firings slightly change the gun's temperature and placement this can further extend the area effects. A single howitzer shell has a lethal radius of around 50 metres. Blast and fragmentation effects extend even further, causing damage and injury. A common M795 155m high explosive howitzer shell will generally have a lethal radius of 50m, with fragmentation spreading significantly further.

#### **Who uses explosive weapons?**

- Explosive weapons are used both by state forces and non-state armed groups. Professionally trained militaries are among those causing this harm. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have been responsible for high levels of civilian harm and are often associated with non-state violence.

#### **What is the legal position of this use?**

- Direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects are illegal under the laws of armed conflict, but using explosive weapons in armed conflict is not illegal per se. The primary concern is use of heavy explosive weapons that, because of their wide area effects, which cause significant civilian harm if used in a populated area – even if directed at an intended military target.

- The laws of armed conflict represent the minimum standards of behaviour even in the most desperate circumstances. Data and evidence shows that more needs to be done to address the specific problem of explosive weapons in populated areas and that there have been situations where militaries have limited the use of certain explosive weapons in certain situations in order to better protect civilians.
- The political declaration builds on states' existing obligations under the laws of armed conflict. It recognises that national policies and practices can go beyond these minimum standards and commits states to develop operational policies and practices that impose limitations and restrictions on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.