



Children play football in a street, Old City of Mosul © T. Nicholson / HI

An Appeal to States: Protect Civilians from Explosive Weapons

From the Voices of Those Affected

As individuals who have directly experienced the horrors of bombing and shelling, and members of the International Network of Explosive Weapons, we come together to issue a crucial appeal for action. We feel helpless and desperate when we have to witness today again how armed conflicts ravage towns and cities in Gaza, Myanmar, Syria, Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen, and elsewhere. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas continues to wreak havoc on people's lives. We raise our voices on behalf of the millions affected by armed conflicts and who endure unimaginable suffering daily. We call on state representatives and decision-makers, to heed our call to strengthen the protection of civilians from the devastating impacts of explosive weapons.

The toll of explosive weapons extends far beyond mere numbers; it shatters communities, destroys infrastructure, and inflicts irreparable harm on generations of people. Witnessing the relentless onslaught of these weapons brings forth a torrent of emotions – anger, despair, and profound sorrow. We, who have borne witness to the destruction of our homes, schools, hospitals, but also the loss of our loved ones, know all too well the insidious nature of these weapons. It is imperative to acknowledge the human cost – the shattered lives, the fractured dreams, and the indelible scars etched upon our collective conscience. Civilians, like you and us, must be better protected and this harm is often foreseeable and must be prevented.

As signatories to the Political Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, we demand states to translate their commitments into meaningful action. Merely endorsing declarations without concrete steps towards implementation renders them hollow gestures. The time for symbolic gestures has passed; now, more than ever, concrete measures are needed to alleviate the suffering of innocent civilians.

States must move beyond rhetoric and take decisive steps to speak out about the devastating impact of explosive weapons on civilian populations. This entails not only educating the public but also fostering a deeper understanding among policymakers and military leaders about the human cost of warfare.

States need robust policies to limit the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to reduce civilian casualties and protect vital infrastructure. These policies should prioritize the safety and well-being of civilians by imposing strict prohibitions and regulations on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The time for decisive action is now. We urge states to stop the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas, as it creates unimaginable harm to civilians. States must go beyond symbolic gestures and implement concrete strategies to protect civilians from the horrors caused by explosive weapons. This entails strengthening current policies and practices, setting new international standards to build new norms and stigmatise harmful practice and legal frameworks, policies and practices, and bolstering humanitarian aid efforts in affected regions. Furthermore, states must collaborate closely with civil society organizations, local communities, and humanitarian agencies to ensure the holistic approach to minimizing civilian harm that experience has shown is most effective.

It is imperative to engage with the people with lived experiences like us– to learn from their insights, to be guided by the goal of reducing harm and suffering, and to implement best practices that lead to meaningful changes in protecting civilian lives. These are not just policy issues, but literally matters of life and death. Let us not be complicit in the perpetuation of violence; instead, let us stand together in pursuit of peace and justice.

In closing, we extend this appeal not as a plea for sympathy, but as a call for solidarity and action. The fate of millions hangs in the balance, and history shall judge us not by our words, but by our deeds. Let us rise to the occasion, guided by the principles of humanity and compassion, but also our moral obligations and strive towards a world where the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is but a dark chapter in our past. As new horrors unfold every day in the lives of people affected by these weapons - there is no time to wait. Lives hang precariously in the balance. The time for change is now and we are counting on each one of you to lead it.

Oslo, 22 April 2024.

