



States must place national bans and restrictions on use of explosive weapons in populated areas to reduce harm to civilians

- A new report from *Explosive Weapons Monitor (EWM)* reveals that 2023 saw unprecedented levels of civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, largely stemming from bombing and shelling in Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.
- Representatives from 86 states will gather in Oslo to review progress on implementing the *Political Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas*, a new agreement to reduce civilian harm.
- Survivors and campaigning groups say concrete action to implement the new agreement is needed if civilian harm is to be prevented.

Oslo, 22 April 2024 – Representatives from 86 governments will convene at a global conference in Oslo, Norway, to review state progress in implementing the *Political Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas*. This is the first time states will meet since the agreement, aimed at reducing civilian harm, was adopted in November 2022.

"The Declaration is an important statement of intent, but it is vital that signatories now go on to implement necessary prohibitions and restrictions on the use of explosive weapons in cities, towns and populated areas due to the high risk of harm to civilians" says Laura Boillot, coordinator for the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).

The risk of harm is heightened when explosive weapons have wide area effects due to their large blast and fragmentation radius, inaccuracy, or delivery of multiple munitions at the same time which inevitably and significantly increases the likelihood of harm to civilians.

Coinciding with the conference, the publication of the *Explosive Weapons Monitor (EWM) Report* shows that civilians and civilian infrastructure in 75 countries and territories were harmed by explosive weapons used by state and non-state actors in 2023.

Heavy bombardment in Gaza, as well as extensive use of explosive weapons in Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen and elsewhere has resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, tens of thousands of people injured, and the reverberating, long-term effects of people losing safe access to aid, education, healthcare, power and water.

Given the scale of harm to civilians in 2023 and early 2024, the EWM report shows that it is more important than ever for states to reduce harm to civilians and the infrastructure they depend on.

"The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has both immediate and long-term effects on civilians," says Katherine Young, Research and Monitoring Manager. *"From Gaza and Ukraine, to Myanmar and Sudan, whenever towns and cities are bombed, it is always civilians that suffer the most."*

Civilian deaths from explosive weapons increased between 2022 and 2023. Civilian deaths in Palestine are the main driver of this increase, along with increases in Sudan, Myanmar and Syria.

The EWM report shows that the Israel armed forces dropped 29,000 explosive munitions on **Gaza** during the first two weeks of the conflict, 90% of which were 1,000-pound or 2,000-pound satellite-guided bombs.

The EWM report further shows that even in contexts where civilian casualties have decreased, the ongoing effects of explosive weapons remain.

- In **Ukraine**, ongoing airstrikes, and attacks with MLRS Grad rockets, missiles and mortars on civilian infrastructure have left people without water, gas or power for weeks, and with only a third of children able to attend in-person schooling.
- In **Sudan**, where use of explosive weapons in populated areas in 2023 led to 4.85 million people being displaced, getting aid to people in need has been made even more difficult by more than 22 incidents of explosive weapons used against humanitarian and protection programs – which in turn compounds the crisis at hand.
- Similarly, while civilian casualties have dropped in **Myanmar** since 2022, airstrikes and artillery attacks against hospitals and medical personnel continue to affect civilians' mental and physical health. For instance, military targeting of healthcare facilities has led to 1.9 million children in Myanmar being unvaccinated, which in turn increases the likelihood of outbreaks of serious diseases.

It also marks EWM's first efforts towards monitoring progress on universalization and implementation of the Political Declaration, which so far indicates that most states have yet to adapt their policies and practices to meet their commitments under the new agreement.

Creating long-term change during times of conflict – the Protection Forum

Alongside the conference, INEW and the Norwegian Red Cross are convening a Protection Forum in Oslo on April 22 that will bring together people with first-hand experience of explosive weapons, people working on national weapons policies, and advocacy groups. In doing so, the agenda emphasises the impact of explosive weapons on people and communities. Marwa Almbaed, a Syrian activist and survivor living in Germany, notes: *“Never forget to include survivors into your exchanges. Listen to people like me who have experienced war first-hand. Because we know the impact of war on the lives of civilians. We know what they need.”*

In this spirit of humanitarianism, the Forum will include an appeal from survivors and civil society groups to stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, in Gaza and other conflicts.

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Additional information

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 | @explosiveweapon

What is the Explosive Weapons Monitor – EWM?

- The Explosive Weapons Monitor is a civil society initiative that conducts research and analysis on harms from and practices of explosive weapon use in populated areas for the International Network on Explosive Weapons. It works with partner organisations to collect and publish data on incidents of explosive weapon use around the world as reported in open sources.

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 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 the direct and indirect effects of this method of war must be addressed urgently, and implementation of the Political Declaration 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 banning and 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 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 use of explosive weapons in populated areas poses unacceptable harm to civilians, and that the risk of harm is heightened when the weapons have wide area effects.
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- 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 take action in a number of key areas, including:
 - Imposing limits on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to avoid civilian harm – the centrepiece of the declaration.
 - Addressing both the short- and long-term effects, resulting from the damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure.
 - Providing assistance to victims, including: people injured, families of those killed and injured; and conflict-affected communities.
 - Collecting and sharing data on civilian harm from explosive weapon use.
 - 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 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 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 – Some systems 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.

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