



Protection Forum
Laura Boillot, Opening Remarks
Norwegian Red Cross, Oslo
22 April 2024

Thank you, Raymond.

And our thanks to the Norwegian Red Cross for hosting us today, and for the excellent collaboration, together with Norwegian People's Aid.

As we convene this Forum today, we do so against a backdrop of increased armed conflicts in the world, where we are seeing intense bombing and shelling in cities and towns, and with devastating consequences for civilians.

In Gaza, the relentless bombardment of this densely populated area has caused so many victims, not just civilians, but also so many children.

In Sudan, the use of explosive weapons has triggered a displacement crisis.

In Ukraine, attacks on civilian infrastructure has left people without access to water, gas or power for weeks on end.

These are just a few examples. In the Explosive Weapons Monitor report that is being launched today, it paints a dismal picture of widespread civilian suffering and devastation, documenting attacks causing harm last year in 75 countries.

Given this situation, we thought it both necessary and entirely appropriate to organise a programme that places a spotlight on some of these contexts and the harrowing reality civilians experience when living under bombing, or dealing with its aftermath.

We are extremely grateful to the individuals who are speaking at this event today, many of whom are sharing their first hand accounts and experiences – so I want to express our sincere appreciation to them for doing this, and for enriching our understandings.

It is so important to listen to these accounts. The problem of explosive weapons use in populated areas is one that disproportionately impacts civilians, and it is paramount that their voices count in this work that follow.

The Declaration should act as a lens to ongoing harm, to generate political attention, and drive the necessary actions in response, bringing about the change that we desperately need to see.

So it is crucial that in reviewing implementation of this agreement, it is not undertaken in the abstract, but rather in a mode of honest reflection and a sharp critique of the scale of bombing and shelling that we are seeing today.

Now more than ever, we need to work together to fulfil the potential and purpose of the Declaration, to build global support and to set stronger standards against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

We must condemn the harm inflicted upon civilians, and without selectivity based on who has caused it or where it is taking place.

And that requires us to critically challenge the status quo, whilst also maintaining a positive vision of norm building in the face of violations and a challenging political environment.

Work around the Declaration is a long-term process, but it must begin now, and it starts with policy change at the national level. Far more needs to be done in this space if we are to have a meaningful impact on the ground.

We need to maintain the partnerships that helped to bring about the declaration in this next phase of work.

Bringing together different communities, armed forces, humanitarian organisations, states, and others is essential to advancing our shared goal of reducing civilian harm and suffering.

The diversity of voices and perspectives should be embraced and valued. The richness of these adds to our collective understandings and it strengthens our resolve to effect change.

Thank you.