



Press release

Bombing in populated areas: A majority of states now recognize the urgency to act

Vienna, October 2nd, 2019. A great number of 133 states gathered for two days at the Vienna Conference “Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare”. A majority of attendants announced that they were ready to work on a **political declaration to end human suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**. The discussions that will take place in the 6 months to come will be decisive to protect millions of civilians living in war zones.

- 133 states had followed the invitation of Austria to hear about the human suffering **caused to civilians by bombing and shelling in urban areas and discuss technical, legal and military aspects of urban warfare**. The Vienna conference **was the first of this scope and a crucial event** to address the devastating humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The big number of states attending the Vienna Conference is already a great success after years of awareness raising by some dedicated states and organisations like HI and other members of the International Network of Explosive Weapons (INEW). A majority of states present at the conference **have now recognized the urgency to act**: They are willing to negotiate in the coming months on a **political declaration** to end human suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons.
- The coming negotiation process starting with a first meeting on 18 November in Geneva should close with a Conference scheduled early 2020, when a **political declaration should open for endorsements**. HI and members of the International Network of Explosive Weapons (INEW) **will continue to dialogue with States to convince them to fully support a strong political declaration** to end the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas and support the affected people.
- **HI call for citizens’ support to mobilize parliamentarians in 7 countries** (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, United Kingdom), **and ensure that governments will engage to the cause**: Citizens are invited to write to their MPs on a dedicated Internet platform [\[LINK\]](#) to ask their government to commit against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- HI strongly and visually reminded the attendants of the conference of civil suffering with a Memorial for the “unknown civilian” placed in the conference venue. The president of the conference Thomas Hajnoczi together with the Vice-President of

ICRC Gilles Carbonnier, Hansjörg Strohmeyer from **UNOCHA** and HI's advocacy director Anne Héry laid down flowers at the monument to pay tribute to all victims of explosive weapons. The Memorial was already installed in Paris last week and will be presented also in other places in the coming weeks.

- Armed conflicts are increasingly fought in populated areas; mainly cities. The impact of the use of explosive weapons is devastating for civilians: According to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) **20,384 civilians were killed or injured by explosive weapons in 2018**. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, **90% of the victims are civilians**.
- The use of explosive weapons in populated areas also leads to the destruction of **essential infrastructure** like houses, hospitals, schools, water and electricity supply systems, leave massive contamination with unexploded ordnances and is one of **key drivers of population displacement**.
- **This is a historical moment for the population living in conflicts**. 20 years ago, HI and the International Campaign to Ban Landmine (ICBL) managed to ban landmines with the adoption of **Ottawa Treaty (1997)**. 10 years ago, the association and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) managed to ban cluster munitions with the adoption of the **Oslo Treaty (2008)**. HI together with INEW has once again the opportunity **to write history and to oblige states and their militaries to better protect civilians in conflicts**. HI's fight remains the same: **to protect civilians in armed conflicts**.
- **Quote of H Advocacy Director Anne Héry:** *"We are very happy to see that states finally act and are ready negotiate a political declaration, as we have been requesting for a long time. To address the suffering of civilians living under the threat of bombing, shelling, and long-term contamination by explosive remnants of war, doing nothing could not be an option. We will constructively participate to this process, provide evidence from affected areas and reinforce public campaigns to make sure that this unique possibility will put an end to the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas and improve support to affected people."*

About Humanity & Inclusion

HI is an independent international aid organisation. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 35 years. Working alongside people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Since it was founded in 1982, HI has set up development programmes in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. There are eight national associations within the network (Germany, Belgium, Canada, United States, France, Luxembourg, UK and Switzerland), working tirelessly to mobilise resources, co-manage projects and increase the impact of the organisation's principles and actions. HI is one of six founding organisations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize and winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. HI takes action and campaigns in places where "living with dignity" is no easy task.