



Press release for immediate release

Nagorno-Karabakh: torrent of bombs in populated areas must stop

Ottawa, 8 October 2020 – Humanity & Inclusion (HI) expresses its deep concern about reported civilian suffering in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The violence rapidly escalates in populated areas, putting the lives of civilians in grave danger. Humanity & Inclusion supports the international call for a ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh and call on states to develop a strong international agreement against bombing in populated areas in 2021.

Civilian casualties have been [reported](#) in high numbers in the cities of Stepanakert and Ganja. Vital civilian infrastructure has been destroyed and families have fled.

“When exploding weapons are used in populated areas, not only do many people suffer immediately, but the bombs destroy critical infrastructure—hospitals, water treatment systems and schools—on which they depend daily”, says Alexis Gaiptman, Canadian Executive Director of Humanity & Inclusion.

“Many heavy explosive weapons used in urban warfare today were originally designed for open battlefields. They are inaccurate weapons putting entire neighbourhoods at risk, multiple rocket systems simultaneously firing over a wide-area, munitions producing large blasts and fragmentation effects... This practice has major humanitarian consequences and it must be stopped.”

Such bombings force civilians to abandon all their belonging and to flee to safer areas. Already, [a reported 50% of Karabakh's population and 90% of women and children — 70,000 to 75,000 people — have been displaced](#), according to the Karabakh rights ombudsman Artak Beglaryan, who was quoted by the AFP news agency. Previous Humanity & Inclusion [reports](#) clearly link displacement and bombings.

“We fear that if the violence brings the region closer to all-out war, there will be long-term humanitarian consequences in the region,” says Humanity & Inclusion Armed Violence Reduction Director Emmanuel Sauvage. “We’d see permanently displaced families, contamination of large zones by explosive remnants, complex injuries and long-term psychological trauma, and a sharp reduction of vital services. Some bombs and other

explosives fail to detonate on impact, so even those who manage to escape death or injury from the immediate blast find it next to impossible to remain living near the bomb site. Inevitably even more die or are displaced by the indiscriminate destruction and the dangerous debris.”

The BBC [reports](#) that 220 people have been confirmed killed since September 27, and states that there are fears both military and civilian casualties are much higher. According to the French NGO ACTED, [more than 500 private homes](#) have been completely destroyed or seriously damaged.

Working toward an international agreement against bombing in urban areas

Almost a year ago to the day, [a diplomatic process began](#) to reach a political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, a practice that has long-term and deep humanitarian consequences. More than 70 States have been involved in the drafting of this international political declaration.

“We call on all States to develop a strong international agreement with clear and strong commitments against the use of heavy bombs in towns, cities and other areas that are populated by civilians,” says Anne Héry, Humanity & Inclusion advocacy Director. “This agreement must have concrete effects on the ground by better protecting civilians.”

“This political process should have the world’s attention,” Gaipman adds.

The [draft](#) of the political declaration is at its final negotiation stage between States, UN agencies, international organizations and civil society. The international political declaration will be proposed to States for endorsement during a conference in Dublin next year.

More information

Previous, relevant reports can be found on our [federal website](#).

Humanity & Inclusion is a co-founder of [INEW, the International Network on Explosive Weapons](#), and sits on its steering committee.

Various experts available for comment in Europe and North America

Contact Gabriel Perriau | g.perriau@hi.org | +1 (514) 945-0309

About Humanity & Inclusion (HI)

Humanity & Inclusion is an independent international aid organization. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict, and disaster for 38 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, Humanity & Inclusion has set up development programs in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. The network of eight national associations (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and

the United States) works constantly to mobilize resources, jointly manage projects, and to increase the impact of the organization's principles and actions. Humanity & Inclusion is one of six founding organizations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and the winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. Humanity & Inclusion takes action and campaigns in places where "living in dignity" is no easy task.