



Diplomatic discussions against bombing in urban areas

“Bombs destroy cities in days. It takes decades to rebuild.”

Ottawa, March 3rd 2021 - Devastated cities in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and beyond; thousands of families unable to return home because of destruction and explosive contamination; lives shattered by death and disabling injuries... States must urgently resolve the problem of bombing in populated areas. After months of interruption due to COVID-19, diplomatic negotiations on developing international agreement against bombing in populated areas have resumed. On 3-5 March, States will meet online to discuss the draft proposed for an international agreement against this scourge. States will meet again in the spring to negotiate the final text - the last chapter before a conference, when the international agreement will be opened for signature. Humanity & Inclusion (HI) calls on States to actively participate and support a strong agreement to guarantee civilians' protection against urban bombings.

- The March 3-5 discussions revive an important diplomatic process to draft **an international agreement addressing the civilian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**. This Ireland-led process started in October 2019. It was temporally disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, more than 70 States are involved in drafting the international agreement.
- A final round of negotiations is expected to take place in Geneva later this spring. Then, **the international agreement should be proposed to States for endorsement during a conference later in 2021**.

Proposed text doesn't go far enough

- The international agreement would bring undeniable progress for the protection of civilians in modern conflict. Proposed text for the **international agreement to address the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas** is circulating among State's delegations. It will be discussed during the 3-5 March online meeting. To this end, text improvements are still needed:
- *Civilian harm and suffering*. The text should **clearly describe and acknowledge the civilian harm and suffering that result from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 90% of victims are civilians. The text must also recognize **the long-term humanitarian impact of bombing in populated areas**: Destruction of vital infrastructure, long-term displacement, contamination of land by explosive remnants...

- [Systematic harm on civilians](#). The draft text states that the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas “can” have devastating impacts on civilians. The use of the word “can” is misleading: **Evidence shows that these weapons always impact civilians when used in cities**. This is why ICRC and the UN-General Secretary asked States to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. Therefore, the political declaration must call for an end to the use of explosive weapons with wide-areas effect - the most destructive weapons - in populated areas.
- [Wide-area effects](#). **The draft declaration relates to explosive weapons with wide area effects but does not sufficiently explain the characteristics of these weapons**: Many explosive weapons with wide-area effects used in urban warfare were originally designed for open battlefields. Heavy bombs and inaccurate weapons put entire neighbourhoods at risk, multiple rocket systems simultaneously fire over a wide area, munitions produce large blast and fragmentation effects...
- [Victim assistance](#). HI appreciates that victim assistance is part of the political declaration. But the commitment to assist victims should be strengthened and made concrete enough to bring effective relief for those injured, survivors, family members of people killed and/or injured and affected communities.

Some States underplay danger

- In their last written contributions to the text of the political declaration some States - notably France, Belgium, Canada, United Kingdom and Germany - related the problem of human suffering caused by explosive weapons to the “indiscriminate use” of these weapons and introduced the modifying “can” language. The text should definitively address the indiscriminate or disproportionate **effects** of these weapons, especially the effects of explosive weapons with wide-area effects, as it is well documented that their use in populated areas is always indiscriminate.
- Some States, like the United States or France in their joint paper, prefer to focus on violations by non-States armed groups. This reduces the scope of a political declaration and leaves out the responsibility of all States party to a conflict.
- HI considers that there is a minimum standard on which States have to agree on: States should unconditionally support **not to use the most destructive weapons in cities**, as UN and ICRC urged in 2019.

Proposition of quotes

- “Over and over again, we see the human suffering caused by urban bombing. It must stop. In Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and recently in Nagorno-Karabakh, we have witnessed disastrous consequences for civilians in cities subjected to carpet-bombing. We have won the fight against landmines (1999) and cluster munitions (2008), we have now a historic opportunity to clearly say ENOUGH to urban bombings. States must recognize the indiscriminate human

suffering caused by bombing in populated areas and their lasting effects. They must protect civilians.”

- “In a matter of days, bombs can destroy an entire city. It takes decades to rebuild it. Heavy bombing in populated areas kills and injures civilians, destroys infrastructure and forces families to abandon all of their belongings to flee to safer areas. Permanently displaced families, contamination of large zones by explosive remnants, complex injuries and long-term psychological traumas, and an acute reduction of vital services (schools, health centers, etc.) - this is a mere taste of the long-term humanitarian impacts of bombing in populated areas. It must end.”

Reaching an international agreement

- HI and members of the International Network of Explosive Weapons (INEW) are working with States to convince them to fully support a strong political declaration **to end human suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and to ensure support to the victims of these weapons.**
- This diplomatic process to reach a political declaration to address the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas started in October 2019. So far, more than 70 States have been involved in the draft of the international political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- The draft of the international agreement is at its final stages of negotiation between States, UN agencies, international organizations and civil society. **A final round of negotiations is due to take place in Geneva this spring. Then, the international political declaration will be proposed to States for endorsement during a conference later this year.**

About Humanity & Inclusion (HI): HI 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, HI 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. HI 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. HI takes action and campaigns in places where “living in dignity” is no easy task.

Learn more: www.hi-canada.org

Press contact:

Gabriel Perriau

g.perriau@hi.org