



Top UN, ICRC leaders urge stepped up global support to protect civilians from explosive weapons in populated areas

Milestone political declaration to open for signature on 18 November

NEW YORK/GENEVA, 14 November 2022 – The heads of three UN entities and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today urged States to support a new political declaration to protect civilians from explosive weapons in populated areas.

UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell, and ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric are jointly appealing to States to support the declaration on “Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.”

In conflicts around the world, civilians continue to endure the devastating consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. When used in cities, towns and villages, these weapons often have effects well beyond their targets. They claim countless lives and limbs, cause widespread destruction, and deprive people from essential civilian services, such as water and sanitation, electricity, health care and education.

The new declaration represents a major collective milestone in protecting civilians from the increasing urbanization of armed conflict. It sends a strong signal worldwide that harming civilians and damaging cities is not a reality we should accept. It strengthens respect for international humanitarian law, notably by committing signatory States to restrict or refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, whenever such use may cause civilian harm.

The declaration will be launched at an [endorsement conference](#) in Dublin, Ireland, on 18 November 2022, after three years of consultations. In the last decade, the momentum for a political declaration has increased markedly, including through [regional initiatives](#) and civil society advocacy.

Given the high likelihood of indiscriminate and disproportionate effects resulting from their use, the UN and the ICRC have consistently [called](#) on all States and parties to armed conflict

to avoid the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas and to strive to take conflict out of urban centres altogether.

“Over the past decade, the United Nations System has worked closely with Member States, the ICRC, and civil society across the globe to encourage parties to put an end to the use of explosive weapons in towns and cities,” said Izumi Nakamitsu, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. “With this new declaration, countries will be taking a stand on the importance of protecting civilians, reducing harm and saving lives.”

The damage and destruction caused by the use of these weapons all too often results in long-term suffering, such as disability and psychological trauma.

Women, men, girls and boys are impacted in different ways, but all civilians suffer. This distress can and should be reduced and even prevented.

“Civilians already bear the greatest brunt in conflict, with explosive weapons in towns, villages and cities only adding to their despair in the short and long term,” said Martin Griffiths, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. “This new political declaration is an important step towards addressing this immense humanitarian catastrophe.”

The human cost of the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas typically reverberates long after the immediate impact, resulting in long-lasting disruption of essential civilian services and prolonged large-scale displacement.

“To bomb a home, school, hospital – any place children live, learn, or rely on – is indefensible,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. “We are calling on countries to keep children safe by protecting them from the harms of urbanized conflict. Their lives and futures depend on it.”

Crucially, the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is at stake. The destructive impacts of explosive weapons on civilians and civilian homes, facilities and infrastructure jeopardize a number of global goals, including reaching food security, ending poverty, and building peaceful and inclusive societies.

Additionally, high levels of explosive ordnance contamination resulting from the use of such weapons in populated areas shatter lives and hamper reconstruction efforts long after hostilities cease. Large-scale, recurrent, and prolonged displacement also exposes people to grave dangers for their health, security, and well-being. Ultimately, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, particularly weapons with wide-area effects, negates people’s fundamental human rights and threatens the future of entire generations.

“For the first time, States are committing to curbing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, a critical acknowledgement of the magnitude of the problem,” said Mirjana Spoljaric, President of the ICRC. “By endorsing and faithfully implementing this new political declaration, States can go a long way in alleviating civilian suffering and upholding international humanitarian law, which is crucial to preserve our common humanity.”

UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu will represent the UN at the signing ceremony and deliver a message on behalf of UN Secretary-General António Guterres to mark the milestone occasion. President Mirjana Spoljaric will represent the ICRC.

The signing ceremony will be webcast live on the YouTube channel of Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs: <https://www.youtube.com/c/irishforeignministry>

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