



For Immediate Release

Press Release:

## **States must urgently implement the international agreement against bombing in populated areas**

Montreal, November 18, 2023 - One year ago, on November 18, 2022, 83 states in Dublin endorsed a landmark international agreement to protect civilians from bombing in populated areas. Between January and September 2023 (AOAV), more than 21,200 people were killed or injured by explosive violence - a clear sign of the urgent need for States to now implement it, even more so in the current context of escalating conflict between Palestinian armed groups and Israel.

On 18th November 2022, States attended an international conference in Dublin to adopt [an international agreement to protect civilians from bombing and shelling in populated areas](#). The agreement - officially known as a 'Political Declaration' - aims to address the devastating and long-lasting humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons. 83 states signed this landmark international agreement, marking the culmination of a three-year diplomatic process. In April 2024, States will be gathering in Oslo for the first international follow-up conference on this agreement to report on the progress made in its implementation. HI is also calling on states that have not yet done so, to endorse the political declaration against bombing in populated areas.

### **A 2023 context that reminds us of the importance of the Declaration**

In the current context of escalating conflict between Palestinian armed groups and Israel, the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), which actively advocated for the Dublin Declaration, is deeply concerned about the impact of this conflict on civilians.

[INEW calls on both Israel and Palestinian armed groups](#) to stop the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas due to the high risk of harm to civilians. INEW also calls on the 83 states that have endorsed the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons to make good on their undertaking to “actively promote the Declaration” and to “seek adherence to its commitments” by the parties to the conflict, including through their public statements, as a means to strengthen the protection of civilians.

## A staggering death toll

Today’s armed conflicts increasingly play out in urban areas, hence the urgent need to reinforce the protection of the civilians living in these areas against bombing and shelling.

More than 14,900 civilians were killed or injured by explosive violence worldwide between January and September 2023, according to [Action on Armed Violence \(AOAV\) monthly reports](#). **More than 4,100 incidents** involving explosive violence occurred around the world, says AOAV. In the two and a half weeks since 7 October, [over 6,800 Palestinians and over 1,400 Israeli civilians have been killed](#), and over 18,000 Palestinian and over 5,400 Israeli civilians have been injured in the conflict – with the overwhelming majority of deaths of Palestinians from bombing.

These very large numbers are due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and growing explosive weapons use in conflicts in Myanmar, Somalia, Syria, etc. **During this period, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, more than 80%** of the casualties were civilians.

“Conflicts are more frequently taking place in urban areas, and explosive weapons are almost systematically used. Civilians and civilian infrastructures are increasingly at risk, as we can now see in Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar and Syria but also in the Gaza strip. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has disastrous effects on civilians, causing death, injury, displacement, destruction of essential infrastructure etc. In 2023, more than 80% of the victims were civilians. States endorsed a milestone international agreement against bombing in populated areas last year. They now urgently need to implement this agreement, putting restrictions to the use of the most destructive weapons in populated areas, use all their diplomatic means to secure rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to affected areas, and scaling up the assistance to the conflict affected population.” - HI Advocacy Director Anne Héry

## Cities razed to the ground

Cities such as Mosul (Iraq), Raqqa (Syria), Mariupol (Ukraine), Hodeida (Yemen), Gaza (Occupied Palestinian Territories), but also small villages, medium-sized urban centres - all kinds of populated areas – have been destroyed or damaged by heavy artillery use in recent years. This practice has damaged critical infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, caused large-scale population displacements, prevented humanitarian actors from accessing affected areas, killed and injured scores of civilians and left behind explosive ordnance contamination that will endanger lives for years to come. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas will have long-term effects in civilian communities.

“Every day, we see the long-term humanitarian impact of the bombing and shelling of urban areas that has been going on for years in Syria. Major cities like Homs, Aleppo, Raqqa, etc., have been massively bombed, causing death, the destruction of vital infrastructure and the displacement of thousands of families. In Raqqa, 6 years after the armed violence, the local population is still exposed to the danger of explosive ordnance. HI’s deminers remove and defuse explosive items every day, but it will take decades to make the area safe.” - Syria Country Manager Myriam Abord-Hugon

## What needs to be done

HI is calling on States to stop using the most destructive weapons in town, cities and other areas where people live and to provide assistance to conflict-affected civilians. Parties to conflict must collect and share data on explosive weapons use and provide more transparency on the impact of their military operations in order to improve understanding of the humanitarian consequences and enable rapid humanitarian responses to the populations in need.

## HI campaign

For years, HI, a founding member of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), has been calling for increased protection of civilians in urban warfare. HI played an active role in the 3-year diplomatic process between 2019 and 2022 that led to the Dublin conference in November 2022 and the endorsement of the international agreement to protect civilians against the bombing of populated areas. On April 2023, HI and its INEW partners published an issue of the Explosive Weapons Monitor entitled: ‘Explosive Weapons Monitor 2021-2022: Two years of harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons’. This was the first global report **on the bombing and shelling of towns and cities**. Its publication came six months after the [Dublin conference](#). The Explosive Weapons Monitor is an annual publication. HI continues to participate in initiatives to monitor how signatory States are implementing the agreement and will continue to lobby non-signatory states to join the political declaration.

## About Humanity & Inclusion

Humanité & Inclusion (formerly Handicap International) is an international solidarity organization that has been working for over 40 years to ensure that people with disabilities and populations affected by crises, conflicts and disasters are never left behind. The organization is present in nearly 60 countries, where it runs projects focused on the inclusive development of people with disabilities, provides humanitarian aid to populations in crisis, and helps to reduce armed violence through awareness-raising, mine clearance and explosive ordnance education. Recognized for its advocacy work, HI is one of the founding organizations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. In Canada, HI has been based in Montreal and Ottawa for nearly 20 years. For more information, visit [www.hi-canada.org](http://www.hi-canada.org)

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