



Press release

Diplomatic process against bombing in populated areas

States must commit to the political declaration supported by UN Secretary General António Guterres

Ottawa, 26 May 2020. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres published his annual report on the protection of civilians. He will brief the Security Council during the protection of civilians open debate (virtual) on 27 May at 10:00 a.m. (New York time). In his report, the Secretary-General denounces the practice of bombing in populated areas and the disastrous consequences for civilians. He supports the current diplomatic effort to develop a political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. HI and its partners from the International Network on Explosive Weapons ([INEW](#)) are fully engaged in this diplomatic process which started in October 2019 to end bombing in urban areas and urge States to support a strong political declaration to end human suffering caused by explosive weapons.

- **United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres** says in his report (published on May 22) that he “welcomes” the ongoing efforts of Member States and other relevant actors to develop a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. "As the discussions continue, States should commit to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and develop operational policies against such use", he added.
- **The final draft of a political declaration** against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is about to be finalised after 9 months of intense discussions between States and NGOs. **Ireland is committed to host an international conference to invite States to endorse it.**
- **250,000 people** were killed and injured from the use of explosive weapons around the world between 2011 and 2019. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, **over 90% of those killed and injured were civilians during that period.**
- **Massive bombardments in populated areas have terrible humanitarian consequences:** families torn apart, life-changing injuries, psychological trauma, forced displacement, destruction of essential infrastructure (hospitals, ports, bridges, etc.) and ever worsening poverty. Massive bombardments in Libya, Syria and Yemen has also had long lasting effects on the development of these countries by destroying vital infrastructures and services, and disrupting economy. The contamination caused by explosive remnants of war will impede or make more difficult any efforts for reconstruction.
- **Quote 1:** “90% of the people who are killed by explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians. The use of explosive weapons is a major problem for the protection of civilians in conflict. Plus, bombing in populated areas has long lasting effects and pushes countries away from development: in Syria, in Yemen and in Libya, it will require States to mobilise many resources (human, financial, etc.) for many decades to decontaminate the explosive remnants

of war, to rebuild bridges, roads, factories, hospitals, schools and to restore the local economy.”

- **Quote 2:** “States have a historic opportunity to make a real difference in protecting civilians from a major cause of humanitarian catastrophe in modern conflict: the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We are calling to all States to acknowledge the harm caused to civilians by explosive weapons in populated areas and promote strong language for the future political declaration. France and the UK in particular, as permanent members of the Security Council should engage unequivocally to ensure that the opposition to the project conveyed by countries like China or the US does not sabotage the future Political Declaration.

Example of Syria destroyed by a decade of massive bombardment

- Since December 2011, there has been repeated use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Syria. Many civilian infrastructures have been hit, including schools, health centres and hospitals. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) reports that nearly **80,000 people were killed or injured by explosive weapons between 2011 and 2018, 87% of which were civilians.**
- Working in Jordan and Lebanon HI teams are witnessing the suffering and trauma of the Syrian population and impossibility of their return due to the huge work which may never be achieved to restore social or economic activities and the life-threatening risks of heavy contamination. As Syria’s essential infrastructure and economy are destroyed, **80% of Syrians currently live below the poverty line.**
- Main cities like Aleppo, Homs and Raqqa are totally or partially devastated. These locations saw heavy aerial bombardment, leaving roads, housing, schools, health centres, and water and sanitation systems either destroyed or rendered non-functional.
- **Contamination with explosive remnants of war is one of the main obstacles preventing the return of refugees and displaced persons. In Syria, 11.5 million people are exposed to the risks posed by explosive remnants of war,** according to UNMAS.
- **Quote 3:** “In Syria, the consequences of 9 years of bombing in populated areas has been terrible: families torn apart, devastated cities, entire populations fleeing en masse, explosive remnants contaminating entire neighbourhoods, etc. People are in a dire situation and will need humanitarian aid for many years to come. The country's infrastructure is being destroyed making access to basic services such as health a top priority for humanitarian organisations.”

Exacerbating effect of bombing on COVID-19 response capacity

- HI fully support United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres calls for a global ceasefire in order to facilitate efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic.
- HI sees on the ground how bombing in populated areas exacerbates the lack of capacity for war-hit countries to respond to the pandemic. Response to the pandemic requires strong health infrastructures and services, strong channels of information for prevention, the capacity of society to organise itself to implement preventive measures and care in an inclusive and accessible way... Everything that massive bombing in urban areas has been destroying in countries such as Libya, Syria and Yemen...

About Humanity & Inclusion

HI is an independent international aid organisation. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 30 years. Working alongside people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our actions and voice 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 (formerly Handicap International) 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 in dignity" is no easy task."

For more information: www.hi-canada.org

Press contact:

Gabriel Perriau – g.perriau@hi.org