Concept Note
PoC Week Side Event: Urban Warfare and Displacement
27th May 2022, 10.00am-11.30am (EST)/16.00-17.30pm (CEST)
Meeting to be held virtually via Zoom Webinar

Background

Urban warfare, particularly the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), causes civilian casualties, destroys vital infrastructure, and hampers access to essential services. Consequently, civilians often find themselves trapped and unable to flee to safety. Where affected populations do manage to flee urban warfare, they face profound and long-lasting challenges, including obstacles to their safe return, rendering such populations particularly prone to protracted displacement.

As highlighted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, “when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 90 per cent of the casualties are civilians resulting in lasting trauma endured by millions of girls, boys, women and men”. Furthermore, not only can the use of heavy explosive weapons force people to flee, it can also impede the return of displaced people to their homes long after the cessation of hostilities, due to, inter alia, the destruction of their houses and the lack of essential services as well as the potential presence of explosive remnants of war (ERW) the removal of which is often dangerous and costly. Not least, the adverse impact of explosive ordnance contamination on stabilization, recovery, local development and reconstruction efforts hinders progress towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the fulfilment of a range of socio-economic rights.

While displacement has many drivers, data collected across a range of conflicts suggests a strong relation between the use of EWIPA and mass displacement of civilians, both internally and across borders.

Therefore, the protection of civilians from the direct and indirect/reverberating effects of the use of EWIPA needs to be strengthened and partnerships between a variety of actors such as Member States, international organizations, NGOs and affected communities should be further developed. A coordinated approach to supporting and advancing protection measures could contribute to respect for international humanitarian law, the prevention of displacement, the protection of the rights of victims, and the creation of conditions rendering possible the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of IDPs and refugees. Gathering and disaggregating the relevant data on the indirect/reverberating effects from the use of EWIPA, such as displacement, and highlighting their cumulative nature, are key to identify the different risks and vulnerabilities faced by women, men, girls and boys during the displacement cycle. Such data and analysis would inform the prevention and protection strategies as well as response and recovery efforts, including assistance to people directly and indirectly affected.

Main Objectives
This side-event aims to raise awareness on the impact of urban warfare, particularly the effects of EWIPA, on civilians and the impacts during the different phases of the displacement cycle particularly through the story of Muhanad, who is a lawyer and a civil society activist who has been displaced with his family in
Iraq and was affected by the use of explosive ordnance in Mosul. This side-event also aims to highlight existent tools, such as UNIDIR’s Menus of Indicators designed to examine and understand the indirect/reverberating effects from the use of EWIPA, and provide a comparable evidence base that informs high-level decision-making on policy and practice. In this respect, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons is expected to focus on the prevention of arbitrary displacement based on her recent report on the subject. Hence, examples could be extracted from UNHCR’s document “Making Arbitrary Displacement a Crime: Law and Practice” as well as UNHCR’s reflections on the early warning mechanisms. Finally, this side-event will conclude with an intervention from the ICRC outlining good practices and actions that parties to conflict could take to prevent civilian harm during military operations and in particular from the use of EWIPA.

Format
The Permanent mission of Ireland, UNHCR, UNIDIR, UNMAS, and ICRC will convene a virtual side event to the annual UN Security Council open debate on the Protection of Civilians during 2022 POC week, with contributions from expert panellists and a moderated discussion.

Moderator:
▪ Ms. Grainne O’Hara, Director of the Division of International Protection, UNHCR;

Speakers / Panellists:
▪ The Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations (opening statement);
▪ Mr. Muhanad Abdulsalam, IDP representative/civil society activist/lawyer from Hamdaniya, East Mosul (Iraq);
▪ Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons;
▪ Dr. Cecile Aptel, Deputy Director, UNIDIR;
▪ Ms. Ilene Cohn, Acting Director, UNMAS;
▪ Ms. Laetitia Courtois, Permanent Observer and Head of Delegation in NYC, ICRC;
▪ Mr. Marc Garlasco, Military Advisor, PAX for Peace.