

Title:

“Humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas”

Sponsors and Organizers:

Organizers:

Humanity & Inclusion (HI)

International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

UN OCHA (Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)

Sponsors:

Austria

Chile

Costa Rica

Ireland

Mozambique TBC

New Zealand

Norway

Date and Time:

12 June - 11am-12.30pm (New York time)

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year’s HAS theme: *“Reinforcing humanitarian assistance in the context of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations: taking action for people-centred solutions, strengthening effectiveness, respecting international humanitarian law and promoting the humanitarian principles”*.

Background and objectives

Bombing and shelling in towns and cities has a devastating impact on civilians. Over the last ten years, the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons, especially those with wide area effects, in populated areas has become a central humanitarian concern.

Data shows that when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, approximately 90% of those reported killed and injured are civilians. Beyond those killed, injured and psychologically traumatised, an even greater number of civilians are affected as a result of damage and destruction to essential infrastructure and services. Hospitals are damaged, hampering the provision and quality of medical care to civilian populations. Damage to sanitation systems creates additional problems around maintaining basic levels of hygiene, resulting in further illness and disease. In the current context of the COVID 19 pandemic, the impact of explosive weapons on access to healthcare and water and sanitation is potentially catastrophic for civilian populations.

The UNSG has repeatedly called on parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas and for states to engage constructively in efforts to develop an international political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of such use. Similarly, the ICRC has since 2011 been calling on States and on all parties to armed conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects. Discussions to develop a political declaration are ongoing, and, alongside the UNSG and the ICRC, more than 100 states have already spoken out on the issue.

Discussion points

This side-event will discuss the humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and the practical actions states and other actors can take now and in the future to address the short and long-term harm to civilians. Panellists will discuss recent examples from ongoing conflicts - Yemen in particular - outlining the needs of the affected population and demonstrating how the use of explosive weapons not only kills and injures civilians, but also triggers broader humanitarian consequences that affect a much larger part of the civilian population. Understanding these consequences, especially as they relate to access to healthcare and water and sanitation, is all the more important in the current context of the COVID 19 pandemic. The side event will also discuss how an international political declaration can provide a tool to address civilian harm, and drive changes in military policy and practice.

The side event speaks directly to the 2020 HAS theme of “*Reinforcing humanitarian assistance in the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the UN, taking action for people-centred solutions, strengthening effectiveness, respecting IHL and promoting the humanitarian principles*”.

Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages

During this side event, HI, INEW, UNOCHA and the ICRC would like to:

- 1) Highlight the civilian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. By focusing the discussion on the realities of conflict situations today, panellists will reiterate the collective call on states and parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, in line with the UNSG recommendation and the avoidance policy advocated by the ICRC. By showcasing the pattern of harm caused by explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas, panellists will speak to the pressing need for an international political

declaration that commits states to avoid the use of such weapons as one way of ensuring more effective protection of civilians from bombing and shelling and their long-term consequences, such as destruction of essential infrastructure and the disruption of vital services, forced displacements and contamination from unexploded ordnance.

- 2) Highlight the reverberating effects of explosive weapons and the link to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of access to essential services for civilians.

By focusing the discussion on the reverberating and long-term impact of explosive weapons used in populated areas, panellists will showcase the interconnectivity between essential services in towns and cities and demonstrate how civilians living in affected areas are exposed to additional vulnerability during situations such as Covid 19. The panellists will use this opportunity to highlight the need for a future political declaration to address the reverberating effects of explosive weapons, and to commit States to provide, facilitate, and support assistance to victims of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The civilian harm caused by explosive weapons also has significant repercussions for humanitarian access. Panellists will underline the duty of states and other parties to conflict to ensure the needs of civilians affected by conflict are met, including by allowing and facilitating rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid to populations in need, so that no one, in particular the most vulnerable, is left behind.

Encouraging States to actively and constructively participate in the ongoing diplomatic process to develop a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Following the presentation of acute humanitarian crises aggravated by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, participants will refer to the ongoing diplomatic process, led by Ireland, to develop a strong international political declaration on the matter.

Format

Online meeting - GoToWebinar

Chair and moderator

Brian Flynn, Deputy Permanent Representative at the Irish mission in New York.

Panel composition

Alison Bottomley, Advocacy Advisor in Yemen, Humanity & Inclusion (HI)

Alma Al Osta, Disarmament and Protection of Civilians Advocacy Officer, International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)

Eirini Giorgou, Legal Advisor, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Simon Bagshaw, Policy Advisor, UN OCHA (Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)

Background Material

- [INEW briefing](#) May 2020 – Protection of civilians
- [The long-term impact of explosive weapons in populated areas in Yemen](#), June 2020, Humanity & Inclusion
- <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/joint-unicrc-op-ed-explosive-weapons-populated-areas-and-covid-19>
- <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/explosive-weapons-cities-civilian-devastation-and-suffering-must-stop>
- <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/explosive-weapons-populated-areas-factsheet>
- <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-report-ihl-and-challenges-contemporary-armed-conflicts>

Connection details to join the event

Registration to the side event:

Prior registration is mandatory for participation to this side event. If you wish to attend, please register, not later than Thursday 11th June 2020, on the following link: <https://forms.gle/a7ZUAQFRF8sqFLMW8>

Please do not forget to indicate if you would like to take the floor so we can coordinate list of speakers.

How to join the meeting:

To access Zoom link to join the side event, please click on the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81675855253>

We kindly ask you to join the session 5 to 10 minutes before the scheduled start in case of technical difficulties, giving us time to admit all participants to the session, and ensure that session can start on time.

Contact

For more information, please contact:

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