

2015 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment

Devastating consequences: the use of explosive weapons in populated areas

Austria and OCHA

Friday 19 June 2015 at 8.15-9.45

Room XXIII, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, in keeping with this year's theme: *The future of humanitarian affairs: towards greater inclusiveness, coordination, interoperability and effectiveness.*

Background and objectives

Around the world, from Afghanistan to the occupied Palestinian territory, Libya to Iraq, Syria to Ukraine and elsewhere, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a major cause of civilian deaths, injuries and displacement. It also has a severe long-term humanitarian impact: e.g., it destroys housing and the infrastructure on which civilians depend, such as hospitals, clinics and water and sanitation systems; it undermines civilians' livelihoods by destroying commercial property and means of production (factories, fishing boats, livestock, etc.); and it leaves explosive remnants of war, which can pose a threat to civilians for decades after a conflict ends. The UN Secretary-General has highlighted the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as a major challenge to the protection of civilians. It is among the key issues addressed in this year's SG's report on the protection of civilians as well as the SG's report on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance. While international humanitarian law (IHL) does not specifically regulate the use of explosive weapons *per se*, the use of such weapons must comply with the general rules on the conduct of hostilities, which contain clear obligations aimed at protecting civilians.

The UN Secretary General has called on all parties to the conflict – national military and security forces, and armed groups – to avoid using explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas. There have been growing international efforts to address this issue. In the course of 2013 and 2014, several international expert meetings were held on the topic. These discussions highlighted the importance of better understanding the impacts of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and recommended the collection of good practices to improve the protection of civilians. In early 2015, the ICRC held an expert meeting on this topic to exchange views with experts and Member States. Austria will organise an expert meeting in Vienna in September 2015.

The side event seeks to build on this momentum. The objective is to raise awareness of the immediate and longer term impacts of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and to continue to enhance the dialogue among humanitarian actors, Member States and other relevant actors around this issue. The event echoes on-going efforts to encourage Member States to recognize the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas and commit to reduce this impact.

Discussion points

Against this backdrop, the side-event will focus on the following suggested questions:

- What are the effects of the use of EWIPA, including in the immediate and long term consequences, both on civilians and essential infrastructure?
- What actions can be taken to reduce and prevent further harm and casualties from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas?
- What steps can be taken to reduce the longer-term consequences of EWIPA?

Intended outcomes/conclusions/recommendations

If available

Format

Panel discussion with interactive dialogue.

(Co-)Chair(s):

- Austria

Moderator:

- *Ambassador Thomas Hajnoczi, Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in Geneva*

Panel composition:

- *Mr. Hansjoerg Strohmeyer, Director, Policy and Development Studies Branch, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*
- *Ms. Anne Héry, Director for Advocacy and Institutional Relations, Handicap International Federation*
- *Ms. Maya Brehm, Consultant, Article 36*

Background Material

OCHA, Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/explosive-weapons-populated-areas>

OCHA, Fact Sheet on Protecting Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/EWIPA%20fact%20sheet%20final.pdf>

International Network on Explosive Weapons, <http://www.inew.org/>

Article 36, <http://www.article36.org/>

Handicap International Federation, <http://www.handicap-international.org/>

Contact

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