



IRELAND

UNGA74 First Committee

Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons

Joint Statement on

Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

Delivered by H.E. Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

24 October 2019

Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Côte D'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia; Malta; Mauritius; Mexico; Monaco; Montenegro; Mozambique; Namibia; Netherlands; New Zealand, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Samoa, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Uganda, Ukraine, Uruguay, and my own country, Ireland.

Chair,

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1265 on the Protection of Civilians.

While we welcome international actions over the past twenty years designed to strengthen the framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, civilians continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts around the world.

As we mark the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions this year, we must continue to strengthen and enhance the protection of civilians and ensure universal compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) by all parties during armed conflict. While acknowledging the many cases in which IHL is respected, thereby protecting the civilian population, we express serious concern regarding the many violations in today's conflicts. We remain gravely concerned at the humanitarian impact resulting from the way active hostilities are conducted in populated areas and in particular by the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects. We acknowledge that there are difficulties inherent to the

increasing urbanisation of conflict, including the challenges posed by the indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices by non-state actors.

Chair,

The use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas has been shown to cause long-term humanitarian impacts, which far outlast the conflicts in which they are used. Beyond the immediate injuries, psychological trauma and deaths caused, the destruction of housing, schools, hospitals, cultural heritage sites, water and sanitation systems and other critical infrastructure means that the civilian population is severely affected over the longer term. This devastation, in turn, can act as a catalyst for the displacement of people within and across borders, rendering displaced persons and refugees further vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. There is also a significant body of evidence on the long-term impacts on the recovery, development and cultural life of affected communities.

We welcome the on-going work of the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society to empower and amplify the voice of those affected by armed violence, and encourage further research into the potential gendered impacts of the issue.

Chair,

The 2019 Report of the UN Secretary-General on Protection of Civilians in armed conflict highlights the extent of the impact on civilians and civilian objects from the use of explosive weapons. According to the report, in 2018, an estimated 20,381 civilians were killed or injured by explosive weapons. Moreover, when explosive weapons, including improvised explosive devices, were used in populated areas, the overwhelming majority of those killed or injured were civilians. These statistics are alarming and reinforce the need for States and all parties to a conflict to act now. We must undertake efforts to reverse this trend and to enhance respect for and compliance with IHL.

The UN Secretary-General's latest report notes that while the "current state of the protection of civilians remains bleak, there is considerable scope for concrete improvements in the promotion and implementation of the law." The Secretary-General's report calls for efforts to enhance respect for IHL and the protection of civilians and civilian objects. We support efforts designed to achieve this goal.

It is clear that where we cannot prevent or resolve conflict, we must work to strengthen the protection of civilians during the conduct of active hostilities. In many conflict situations, there are serious concerns regarding how the rules of IHL are being translated into policies and practice. Much more must and can be done to reaffirm the importance of compliance with IHL by all parties in situations of armed conflict.

Chair,

We welcome the priority that the UN Secretary-General and President of the ICRC have attached to the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas, as demonstrated in their Joint Appeal issued in September 2019. Such direct, high-level engagement gives an important prominence and profile to this issue.

We recognise the call by the UN Secretary-General in the Agenda for Disarmament that States should support the development of measures designed to address the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas. This requires first and foremost, full compliance with international law, especially IHL in the conduct of hostilities. We believe that there are a number of complementary ways through which compliance may be strengthened, notably through the elaboration of a political declaration, the application and where necessary, the development of operational policies more responsive to the challenges of protecting civilians and civilian objects during urban conflict and through the sharing of good policies and practice.

We are encouraged by the level of cross-regional participation in the conference on the Protection of Civilians in Urban Warfare that took place in Vienna on 1-2 October, 2019. This conference was a valuable initiative. We now encourage all States to engage in efforts to address the impacts on civilians caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including by working towards a political declaration in 2020.

The increasing urbanisation of armed conflict raises important questions about how military and civil defence policies and practices address risks to civilians, understand impacts, and mitigate civilian harm, including from explosive weapons used in populated areas. We must pursue our efforts, building in particular on lessons learned, to adapt our practices, doctrines, procedures, operational preparation and equipment in order to minimise the loss of human lives in the civilian population, injuries to civilians, and damage to civilian property that could be caused collaterally during an armed urban conflict.

We acknowledge international and regional efforts designed to share operational practice through structured dialogue among States with the aim of enhancing the protection of civilians and addressing the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We must continue to encourage tangible measures to foster cooperation, training and exchange of technical and tactical expertise between armed forces in order to ensure better protection of civilian populations and their environment during urban warfare.

Chair,

We reiterate support for all relevant initiatives designed to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including regional conferences. We also maintain our support for engagement on this issue in international fora such as the CCW.

Any initiatives undertaken should enhance the protection of civilians and civilian objects in armed conflict, promote and strengthen compliance with IHL and contribute to alleviating humanitarian harm. As part of our broader engagement, we will continue to support the

efforts of the UN, ICRC and civil society who have worked tirelessly and effectively over the last several years to address this challenge.

Chair,

We remain seized of efforts to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and we value and welcome the support of all States willing to commit to these aims.

Thank You.

Check against delivery.