

Ireland National Statement

Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

Meeting of High Contracting Parties

November 2017

Intervention on Agenda Item 12

Other issues of emerging concern to the Convention

Explosive Weapons with Wide Area Effects in Populated Areas (EWIPA)

Mr. Chair,

Ireland welcomes the inclusion of the agenda item on emerging concerns to the convention. We believe the consideration of such issues allows this convention to retain its responsiveness to current events, permitting us as State Parties to react to new technologies and their implications in a timely way, or to re-examine the evolving manner in which existing weapon systems are being used, assessing if such uses contravene international humanitarian law.

In this vein, Ireland regards the increasing use of **Explosive Weapons with Wide Area Effects in Populated Areas** as one of the most serious challenges facing the international community and the implementation of IHL today.

After decades of unprecedented urbanisation in many parts of the world, armed conflicts are increasingly being fought in urban areas with consequential adverse impacts on civilian populations, particularly in prolonged conflicts.

Ireland is gravely concerned by the escalating civilian casualty rates, the resulting forced displacement of populations, the damage to essential services and loss of skilled workers, disproportionate gender impacts, and damage to infrastructure caused by prolonged warfare in urban areas, and in particular are concerned at the harm arising from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects. Reports of serious humanitarian harm from the use of such weapons have been substantiated in many conflicts with the greatest harm being reported from the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts.

Furthermore, the evidence of long-term impact of the use of such weapons on the recovery and development of affected communities is overwhelming. The destruction of schools, hospitals, homes, electrical grids and water infrastructure fundamentally undermines the capacity of societies to function normally and provide adequate supports to affected populations and such destruction also undermines international efforts to support the sustainable development goals.

From our perspective, there is nothing more powerful than the testimonies of victims and survivors. Their voices and experiences must be heard and must be considered if we are to make the right decisions as policy makers. For this reason Ireland has partnered with civil society organisations, such as Handicap International, to empower and give voice to those affected by armed violence.

Last year we supported Handicap International's creation of a handbook on Victim Assistance in the context of the use of EWIPA, which provided valuable recommendations for a future Political Declaration and examined how the issue of victim assistance might be addressed. We regard the inclusion of survivors and those who have been directly affected by conflict as an essential contribution to our work on EWIPA.

This year Ireland has supported Handicap International in its exploration of the impact EWIPA is having on forced displacement of Syrian refugees, focusing on the specific risks to which women and girls are exposed to following multiple forced displacement caused by the illegitimate use of these weapons.

Ireland would welcome further discussion, on the immediate, secondary and tertiary effects of these weapons, on their gendered impact, and on an understanding of what constitutes protected civilian objects during an armed conflict, including in the context of the CCW.

We welcome the *working papers* submitted by the Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands on the use of EWIPA and are encouraged by the increased engagement on this issue.

We urge states to make urgent and substantive progress towards a political declaration reaffirming states' commitment to only use explosive weapons in full compliance with international humanitarian law in particular with Articles 51-57 of Additional Protocol 1 of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Thank you.