



**Statement by Ms. Charlotte Skerten
DPR to the Conference on Disarmament**

**EWIPA Open Consultations on Political
Declaration**

18 November 2019

Thank you Ambassador Gaffey.

At the outset, please allow me to convey New Zealand's gratitude to Ireland for hosting this open consultation today and our thanks also to everyone here for their participation. We look forward to building on the excellent progress made at First Global Conference on the Protection of Civilians in Urban Warfare in Vienna last month, where broad support was expressed for the development of a political declaration.

As a member of the Core Group on EWIPA and a supporter of the related item in the Agenda for Disarmament, we strongly agree with the Secretary General's conclusion, in his report to the Security Council in May this year that "We must take urgent action to reduce the humanitarian impact of urban warfare and, in particular, of explosive weapons." Following the Vienna Conference, it is now very clear that one of the ways the international community can achieve this is through the elaboration of a Political Declaration.

Turning briefly to content which we would like to see included in the political declaration, we wish to highlight the following four key points which we consider to be central to an effective political declaration:

- First, the political declaration should focus on addressing the high likelihood of harm to civilians and civilian objects when explosive weapons with wide area effects are used in populated areas. There should be an acknowledgment that this harm includes not only the direct damage that may be expected to result from an attack using such weapons in a populated area, but also the indirect or reverberating effects that may be expected from such an attack, too.

- Second, the political declaration should focus on compliance with existing obligations under international humanitarian law. We should aim to help frame the application and implementation of these obligations in what is now widely considered to be the “new normal” context for warfare – that is, conflict in urban areas.
- Third, the political declaration should also add value from a policy perspective. In particular, it should provide practical guidance on how to respond to the challenges of protecting civilians and civilian objects during conflict in urban areas.
- Fourth, the Political Declaration should not be an end in itself. Rather, we hope that it will be a launching pad for further engagement and action to address the harm caused by EWIPA.

We would note that all four of these points have also been reflected in various papers circulated by other participants in these discussions – including the valuable papers circulated by the ICRC, INEW and UNIDIR.

Mr Chair, we are delighted that so many states are represented here today ready to take action to reduce the risks associated with the use of EWIPA. We welcome that states appear to be developing a shared understanding of the humanitarian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and a clear pathway forward to address this through a political declaration. As a country deeply concerned about the plight of civilians in zones of conflict around the world, New Zealand looks forward to continuing these discussions and working with you all to conclude the text of an effective Political Declaration on the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.

Thank you.