

## Summary of Global Protection Forum Session 6

*Speakers: OCHA, UNHCR, Article 36, Norwegian People's Aid, ICRC, Civilian Impact Monitoring Project in Yemen, Iraqi lawyer, IDP and explosive weapons survivor.*

As underlined by the [UN Secretary-General](#), the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) is a major cause of civilian harm in armed conflict. Nearly 90% of victims are civilians. Explosive weapons also damage or destroy civilian infrastructure, with reverberating effects on essential services such as water, sanitation, electricity and healthcare. Victims and survivors of explosive weapons can face longer-term challenges of disabilities and trauma. The devastating effects of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are seen currently in Gaza, and have been documented in Ukraine, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and across many other contexts.

An ICRC [study](#) found that the use of EWIPA is a recurring feature of contemporary armed conflicts, and a major cause of civilian harm. In addition, it has serious implications under international humanitarian law. The study found that while civilian harm in urban warfare has many causes and compounding factors, a lot will come down to the choice and use of weapons and tactics by the parties to the conflict. Information collected for the study and other sources clearly point to a pattern of grave civilian harm when heavy explosive weapons are used in cities and other populated areas. The ICRC study concludes that a policy of avoidance with regards to the use of heavy explosive weapons is necessary and possible and provides many recommendations in this regard.

In a milestone achievement, on 18 November 2022, States adopted the EWIPA Political Declaration, which has been endorsed by 83 States. The declaration includes a commitment to adopt and implement policies and practices to avoid civilian harm, including by restricting or refraining from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, where such weapons may be expected to cause civilian harm. The panel underlined that implementing the declaration now is paramount. The panel also spoke to the importance for more states to endorse the political declaration. Protection actors can play a key role in supporting its universalization and implementation.

Speakers highlighted the humanitarian impacts of EWIPA use as witnessed by protection actors on the ground, including for humanitarian access, and the importance of working with communities to mitigate the risk of this harm. Insights were also shared on mechanisms like the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project in Yemen that are serving to provide an operational picture to inform humanitarian programming, victim assistance and response in as close to real time as possible. Additionally, they serve as valuable tools for advocacy and trend analysis.

The Norwegian People's Aid shared examples of effective preparedness and protection strategies to raise awareness and help civilians protect themselves when explosive weapons are used. For example, utilizing social media platforms to disseminate safety messages during conflicts. Collaborating with local organizations has proven to be highly effective in empowering civilians with the tools and knowledge they need to be better prepared and protected against the use of explosive weapons.

The panel concluded with a poignant testimony from a who has personally endured forced displacement and disability as a result of explosive weapons use in Iraq. The speaker welcomed the adoption of the EWIPA Political Declaration and expressed hope for a transformative shift away from the current approach. His expectation is that the declaration will go beyond its initial steps and make substantial progress in significantly reducing harm to civilians.

Key resources:

- [\*Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas\*, 18 November 2022](#)
- [\*Report of the UN Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict\*, 12 May 2023](#)
- [\*Protecting civilians from the use of explosive weapons\*, INEW Briefing note, May 2023](#)
- [\*Implementing the political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas: questions and answers\*](#) October 2023
- [\*ICRC report: Civilians in populated areas must be protected against explosive weapons\*](#), 2022
- CIMP methodology <https://civilianimpactmonitoring.org/methodology>, October 2023
- CIMP thematic report on the impact of armed violence on civilians in different Yemeni cities [https://civilianimpactmonitoring.org/onewebmedia/20210131\\_CIMP%20Thematic%2005\\_Cities.pdf](https://civilianimpactmonitoring.org/onewebmedia/20210131_CIMP%20Thematic%2005_Cities.pdf),