



HIGH-LEVEL PANEL

“Protection of Civilians in Urban Warfare—Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA): Issues, Policy and Practice”

**Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

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Virtual Event
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His Excellency Mr. Simon Conveny, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence of Ireland,
His Excellency Ambassador Gaffey,
Distinguished Panelists,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to thank Ireland for convening this online event, which provides us a valuable opportunity to continue discussions on the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

At a time of such unprecedented global upheaval and uncertainty, it is critical to maintain the momentum on issues that have a direct impact on the lives of civilians.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts continue to rage in many parts of the world.

In March, Secretary-General Guterres called for an immediate, global ceasefire so aid workers could reach people in areas affected by conflict. At the end of June, a group of 170 States signed a collective statement endorsing the global ceasefire.¹ Several regional organizations, 200 civil society groups, and more than a dozen non-state armed groups have also publicly endorsed this call. These endorsements include several parties to ongoing armed conflicts.

However, this rhetorical commitment has not translated to the desired reality on the ground. According to recent statistics, between 23 March and 15 May 2020, armed conflict in 19 countries displaced at least 661,000 people, leaving more people exposed to COVID-19, while also hindering efforts to contain the pandemic.²

In May, Under-Secretary-General for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, and the Director-General of the ICRC, Robert Mardini, and I, published an article on the deadly combination of armed conflict and COVID-19.

We were driven by concerns that, despite the pandemic, the bombing and shelling of cities and towns have continued unabated in conflict-affected places like Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

Fragile health-care systems have been further crippled by the use of heavy explosive weapons, hindering emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic and thus endangering lives.

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1066982>

² <https://www.nrc.no/news/2020/may/armed-conflict-displaces-660000-since-un-call-for-global-ceasefire/#:~:text=Armed%20conflict%20displaces%20660%2C000%20since%20UN%20call%20for%20global%20ceasefire,Published%2022.&text=Armed%20conflict%20forced%20more%20than,efforts%20to%20control%20the%20pandemic.>

This is why your work on preventing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is even more important than ever. We will continue to support all efforts by Member States to address this issue, including through elaboration of a political declaration as well as appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies in conformity with IHL relating to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

This commitment to support was a leading element of the joint appeal issued by the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross last September. In this connection, they called on States to adopt policies and practices that will enhance the protection of civilians when warfare takes place in populated areas, including policies and practices to avoid the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area, due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects.

In addition to these measures, I also appeal to States to support the collection of age and sex disaggregated data on conflict-related deaths, including information on the arms used, as stipulated in SDG Indicator 16.1.2.

I congratulate Ireland for initiating the informal consultative process in Geneva and hope that circumstances will permit the conclusion of the political declaration as soon as possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the benefits of multilateralism while, at the same time, highlighting the critically underdeveloped state of our international institutions and arrangements.

Therefore, as a central component of seeking disarmament that saves lives, I hope action on explosive weapons in populated areas will be a leading part of our collective efforts to build back better.

I look forward to the discussions. Thank you very much.