

## **Comments to the political declaration – Preamble, Section 1** **speaking notes**

*As we are taking the floor for the first time, I would like to thank the Irish mission on behalf of Humanity & Inclusion, also known as Handicap International (HI), for your leadership and determination to successfully finalise the text of political declaration to protect civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.*

*We will be providing some comments from HI's point of view, although we are fully in line with everything that INEW will be presenting as well. Comments that we are providing here are based on our operational, humanitarian and policy experience. The language that we are using is strictly based on the research findings and testimonies of people affected, in different ways by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.*

*Before starting with section 1, I would like to share our appreciation for modifications brought in the title of the political declaration. Deletion of CAN was an action we were hoping to see, because explosive weapons DO cause extensive civilian harm, and there is no "CAN" about it!*

### **Section 1, the Preamble.**

*We still consider that this text, in its structure and focus, is a good improvement and a good foundation for further negotiations and the strengthening of the protection of civilians. We still strongly believe that there is room for improvement to make sure this document serves as a strong and effective tool to protect civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.*

#### **I will start with commitment 1.2.**

*We are content to see this paragraph recognising the direct impacts on civilians.*

*To make it more realistic to the actual situation in the areas affected by the use of explosive weapons, we suggest deleting "CAN" here, and directly express that use of explosive weapons HAVE a devastating impact on civilians. There is so much documented material that we have already provided, if more is lacking we can just turn on any news and live follow what is happening in Ukraine and Yemen.*

*And very important, we are very thankful that the political declaration mentions the psychological impact of explosive weapons in 1.3. But we believe that it would better fit in the 1.2 paragraph, as another example of a direct impact of use of explosive weapons.*

*It is very difficult to distinguish which aspect of war in general falling heaviest on mental state of a civilian. Is it fear for one's own life, the life of the loved ones, fear for one's house or constant internal displacement or refuge abroad? But one thing we are sure of, and what we have collected from survivors that we directly work with, is that experience of living under bombing and shelling is terrifying, causes fear, depression, sadness, and it is a heavy psychological burden. We believe it should be described as direct impact of explosive weapons use.*

*And related to that, we also think that CAN should be deleted because there is no doubt that bombing and shelling does cause severe psychological trauma, affecting individuals and entire communities, and to such an extent that it represents a very specific challenge for those providing assistance.*

*So, in 1.2, After "lifelong disability", we suggest adding: **and living under bombing and shelling causes severe psychological trauma and psychosocial harm.***

Also in **1.2**, we would like to add that many indirect effects are resulting also from lack of civilian access to humanitarian relief. When humanitarian organisations cannot provide assistance to besieged areas and meet the basic needs of civilians, then people die or suffer more due to lack of services that could be provided if a principled and unimpeded humanitarian access is allowed or possible.

Ambassador, HI will be referring to the importance of humanitarian access in other Sections of the political declaration because the **scale of needs generated by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is often massive**. The density of the population and complexity of urban services, the often-protracted nature of urban fighting, and tactics and weapons used by parties to the conflict, result in unprecedented humanitarian needs. Not only for direct victims, but for the whole population.

- Recent example: Population of Kharkiv: 1,4 million / Population of Odessa: nearly 1 million people
- Destruction of vital infrastructure are done exactly in areas where this specific infrastructure is needed: when a hospital is bombed in a city, it is the whole population of the city who is affected. Paradoxically, in areas where needs are growing due to bombing/shelling, normal infrastructure would already have difficulty to cope with the needs – if the infrastructure is affected, it is even more difficult to respond to vital needs. This is where humanitarian access is needed → this is why humanitarian actor have to intervene quickly and safely to save lives and release the burden from overloaded services.

**In 1.4** we are suggesting additional and very obvious references to other longer-term impacts such as on public health, livelihoods, and development more broadly. We are also suggesting to refer to “explosive ordnance” instead of “unexploded ordnances”. With this terminology we are covering more unexploded weapons, but we are also aligning the language with IMAS which is already well understood by the humanitarian mine action operators.

In a recent report, HI analyses the impact of explosive ordnance, including unexploded ordnances, on affected populations in the Ninewa governorate in Iraq. Last year, nine out of 13 hospitals in Mosul were still damaged, negatively impacting healthcare capacity and reducing the number of hospital beds by 70%. This is way under the number of hospital beds required to meet the internationally recognized minimum standard in a humanitarian context.

The contamination of lands by exploded ordnances and/or the damages caused to water infrastructures also impact livelihoods and food supply. In Sinjar for instance, the income of farmers in certain areas has dropped by more than 60%. The total damage caused to agriculture is estimated to have reached a total of 2.1 billion USD and as of today, 730 000 people in Iraq are food insecure.

**1.4 bis** - We suggest adding a description of factors that produce the wide area effects to ensure good understanding of this concept, and straightforward explanation that, when used in populated areas, these wide area effects systematically create humanitarian consequences, posing threat to civilians and creating damage to civilian objects.

**Wide area effects result from the wide blast and fragmentation radius of the weapon, inaccuracy of delivery, the delivery of multiple munitions across an area, or a combination thereof.**

**1.7.** In 1.7, the experiences of survivors should be recognised as important contributions towards policy-making by welcoming work to amplify, integrate and respect the voices of those affected.

This finalises HI's comments on this section 1.  
Thank you ambassador for giving us the floor.